

# Bad neighbors

**By: Wierdowithagun**

A new couple moves in next door, And these boys are sent on the ride of their lives. Rated T for Hidan, no Yaoi but boyxboy pairings.

Status: complete

Published: 2013-04-01

Updated: 2013-08-13

Words: 54656

Chapters: 14

Rated: Fiction T - Language: English - Genre: Adventure/Suspense - Characters: Neji H., Shikamaru N., Itachi U., Hidan - Reviews: 32 - Favs: 35 - Follows: 19

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9158686/1/Bad-neighbors>

Exported with the assistance of [FicHub.net](http://FicHub.net)

# Bad neighbors

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Bonus chapter](#)

# Chapter 1

A/N- Heh, So my wonderful inspirational best friend of mine and I were just talking about a few of my other stories, and one of us came up with this magnificent thought. If you've read any of my other fics, I may or may not exaggerate Hidan's insanity, heh, which I just can't elp myself with, and this fic will be just another of those. But this one is going to be out of my comfort zone, so don't get on my ass about ooc-ness okay?

And don't judge my coupleing okay? Most of it's an inside joke, so if you don't like the notion then just stop reading right now.

Hopefully, It will still be as entertaining as all the others despite. n\_n

Bad neighbors

"They're at it again Shikamaru!"

"Hm?"

"I can't beleive this. Those bastards are ruining the entire neighborhood. It's a rediculous notion that everyone else is forced to leave their homes when the only problem around here is them."

The brunette slammed open his window and shoved his head out into the night air. "IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED THERE ARE PEOPLE TRYING TO *SLEEP* !"

Shikamaru grinned, twirling the toothpick around in his mouth as his normally oh-so-composed lover screamed out at the neighbors. He wanted to inform him of how useless it was to shout demands at the couple next door, inevitablely it would only make things worse and mark their house as a target for their albino neighbor's schennanigans. But he'd learned throughly since the troublemakers had moved in a couple weeks ago that Neji Hyuuga did what he

damn well pleased when he was upset, which didn't happen often, thankfully.

*"You shut your dirty whore mouth you fucking snobby motherfucker! I'll fucking come over there and rip that pretty shit hair right out of your head and shove it right up your-"*

He slammed the window shut, shuddering from the continued threats being shamelessly flung at him for all to hear. He turned to find an amused Shikamaru staring back at him, one brow raised. His cheeks burned with the anger he desperately tried to contain. It was absolutely unbearable to let men older than they were behave in such a way. It was plain embarrassing. And this had been going on for far too long in his opinion.

To be honest he'd been quite please to hear the gossip on the two beasts next door when they were first lugging in their furniture, a cheap and shabby as it was. It pleased him to no end to see what appeared to him as an interracial older gay couple becoming neighbors. Finally they would have someone in the neighborhood to relate with, someone to help them ward off the bullies that persisted to graffiti their house and all their other means of gay-bashing.

OH, but introducing themselves had been an adventure. He was shocked to find such behavior coming from the younger of the two, who he learned didn't have or didn't wish anyone to know their last names. He was absolutely foul in every way, and it possibly had made it more shocking seeing as the fact that the man was so physically alluring.

"That man is a monster in human clothes." he mumbled before slipping back into bed. The spikey-haired man beside him laughed quietly.

"I don't understand how you can be so unfazed by those two.." Neji sighed and brushed hair from his eyes. He hated to sleep with it in a pony tail but it fell in his face so much... He often quarreled with himself over whether to get it cut or not.

"They're troublesome indeed, but the best thing you can really do is ignore them." Shikamaru muttered, his face returning to its usual bored expression as he watched his boyfriend fuss with his hair. But a very loud and sudden crash sent his dark eyes flicking to the window, and had Neji snorting at his comment.

"How can you possibly ignore that?"

*"Motherfucker! That fucking hurt Kakuzu!"*

Kakuzu, Neji hadn't quite figured him out. To be honest, the older member of the household across the way sort of inherently terrified him. He would swear to God that the dark skinned man who never revealed his face was some sort of terrorist. He hated so much to toss stereotypes like that around, but it was so difficult not to assume. The only thing that helped deter the thought was that the man lacked the accent, but his voice was extremely deep and just one of those that you'd think to hear from the serial killer in a horror movie. It wasn't much of an exchange.

Shikamaru rolled his eyes, "Well, You can't ignore it I suppose. But taking any action against it is just more trouble than it's worth. " The sound of glass violently breaking made him flinch slightly, and he did his best to give Neji and comforting smile. "Soon enough we'll have the house paid off, then we can turn it around and buy a new one far, far away from here and sell this one to some other suckers."

"It's unfair of us to have to be the ones to move away though! We worked so hard to build up the credit enough to get this house, we've undoubtedly increased the value of this place by thousands since we've been here. It's been personalized *by us for us*. We shouldn't have to be the ones to move. I don't understand why you don't try harder to use that wonderful brain of yours to get them out."

The Young Nara shrugged. They'd talked about this near fifty times, and he could only repeat the same thing so many times before he just didn't care anymore. There really was no settling his partner when he was riled by those two. And he couldn't deny that those

across the street were insane, because they undoubtedly were, no question there. But he'd even gone and talked to the man, Kakuzu, a few times before. He seemed the closest one to sanity and was the head of the household, but he'd only informed Shikamaru that there really was no controlling Hidan. And that damn man was so invested in the property that he'd spent what he called 'far too much' money on, Shikamaru knew it wouldn't be worth the effort. He had met a scant few like Kakuzu, just from his demeanor he knew the man would hardly be scared of anything. And just as well, Shikamaru wasn't a weak man, but Kakuzu... he would probably grind him into the dust should things brew to any sort of physical fight. The man was experienced, and tough, and Shikamaru had once witnessed him literally tearing Hidan limb from limb. He had gotten terribly ill that night... and his poor boyfriend hadn't the slightest clue. He kept insisting he paid closer attention to what he ate.

There was a knock at the door, and Neji's face contorted with rage.

"Don't answer it."

The brunette flipped the covers off himself and twisted to get it.

"Neji, don't answer it."

"I'm going to tell that asshole off."

"I'm telling you, you really don't want to answer that."

"Don't tell me what I don't want to do..."

He listened to the quick and heavy footsteps as his lover stomped angrily to the front door. Shikamaru rolled his eyes and swept the blanket off himself too. If it was, indeed, Hidan at the door then he would have to use his jutsu to keep from destroying the house in his inevitable attempt to rip his lover apart. And as ticked off as he was, Shikamaru would probably have to use it on him as well to keep him from fighting back. Neji may still be unaware, or perhaps not because the guy was sharper than a shuriken, but trying to injure the

prematurely gray-haired man was a complete and total waste of energy. He may complain when pain was inflicted but Shikamaru had the suspicion that he was some sort of masochist, surely some part of the made-up God the man followed devoutly.

"What a drag..." he muttered, taking out his toothpick and flicking it into the trashcan.

*"Hey! I need a favor."*

"Shove it up your ass cretin, get off my property." The door squeaked as Neji tried to slam it shut, and a loud thunk shook the walls as Hidan most likely slammed his foot down to stop it.

*"You little bitch. Quit being a shitty neighbor!"*

"ME?" Neiji almost shrieked.

Shikamaru trudged into the room and sighed deeply. Really, it was almost two in the morning. This was ridiculous. Hidan, the mentally unstable and physically perfect neighbor was at the door. There were very few spots on his exposed upper torso that weren't covered in either dark bruises or what was likely his own blood. And the man was absolutely covered in dirt. Glass shards were wedged into his right hand and forearm, which looked as if it had been nearly ripped off.

Shikamaru tipped his head as he looked at it. Yea, it definatly had to be at least pulled from the socket. And yet the man was standing there as if it were the most normal thing in the world. But, he couldn't really say he didn't expect it. In all honesty seeing the terrible things the zealot did on a daily basis kind of did make it normal for him to show up like this.

"Neji, please keep your composure." he muttered under his breath. It was more to himself since he doubted his lover could hear anyway. Hidan heard, or just now noticed the Nara's presence and his violet eyes flicked over to him. The smile he gave Shikamaru made his

skin crawl, and he could swear he even winked at him. Neji must obviously not have seen, being the jealous man that he was.

*"Anyway, Kakuzu won't let me back in the house."*

Neji barked out a laugh that was almost humorous in its extreme sarcasm. "You'll have to kill me before I'll let you step foot in this house."

Hidan stared at him without a trace of emotion, Shikamaru's heart seemed to jump up into his throat. The Hyuuga knew damn well better than to give that maniac an invitation like that. He took a few steps forward, getting ready to restrain the both of them. It really was difficult to keep the jashinist under control when he was pissed enough, however. He'd had to break up a fight between the couple next door exactly twice in the two horribly long weeks they'd been here. Normally he would just let them fight it out, but at the rate they were going, the fight would have moved onto his property and most likely flattened his house in the process.

*"I'll give you my weed."* Hidan said, shrugging.

This of course threw both of them off, and left them both speechless. "What.. what's wrong with you?" Neji stammered.

Hidan raised his eyebrow, unusually calm. *"Aw c'mon. I smell the dank ass shit you guys smoke all the time. I'm not fucking stupid. It's good stuff. Zetsu grows it himself. You know a fucker that's half-plant knows his shit."*

"Are you serious?" Shikamaru accidentally said out loud. He had seen the monstrous plant man only once, and it was only for a moment. Taking what he had just heard he could only assume he had been delivering marijuana to Hidan, and Shikamaru had run home to pick something up. He had just taken the first step off his porch when he looked up and locked eyes across the way with the beastly man. The man had literally sunk into the ground right in front of him, giving a wicked smile that resulted in night terrors for



Shikamaru for a total of 3 nights. Poor Neji had been beside himself, but even if he'd wanted to explain he didn't think he could.

*"As tits. I swear to the great and mighty Lord Jashin I won't trash your place. But I've slept outside before, it's fucking gay. Don't wanna go through that shit again. Had so damn many mosquito bites, pretty sure I died at least 3 times from West Nile..."*

"Please... I really couldn't care less..." Neji interrupted. But shikamaru's interest had been peaked. Neji seemed to catch this, and turned to give him a 'Don't even think about it' glare.

A low shout that was unmistakeably Kakuzu made Neji turn back to Hidan, who head turned as well back toward his house. Neither of the pair could discern what was being said, but Hidan's face broke into a grin, and Shikamaru could only assume that it was an order for him to get back over there.

*"Eh, false alarm guys. Thanks for your fuckin' hospitality though."* He flicked Neji on the ear before turning and leaping off the porch, laughing. Shikamaru had to quickly restrain the Hyuuga before he went barreling after him. It really was just easier to leave them alone, as badley as he wanted to let him go. He could see the scenario in his mind. He had yet to really actually see the albino man fight seriously, but something told him he would be formidable. Neji could damn well take care of himself, but that man, with his horrible sadistic god and his own masochistic nature... he had to have something hidden up his sleeve that they had yet to see. Shikamaru shuddered at the thought, though his curiosity betrayed him. He couldn't decide as to whether he wanted to witness it or not...

After a surprisingly short amount of time the two were back in bed, Shika's eeyes drooping dangerously low.

"Good God that man is a psycopath..." Neji muttered pulling the blanket up over his shoulder.

"Just ignore it.." Nara said drearily..

"That's like trying to ignore the temperature. Trying to ignore that man is like going out in the middle of a blizzard in a damn leotard. Absolutely miserable. You should go have another talk with Kakuzu in the morning." Neji ended matter-of-factly, and Shikamaru felt his face harden. He hated going over there, why couldn't he just leave it the hell alone. It wouldn't do a single damn thing and the thought of having to look into that man's multicolored eyes (seeing as that was the only part of his face you could see, and Shikamaru didn't like to seem intimidated) made his gut churn. Red sclera with unrealistically defined green irises and no pupil seemed like an almost comical combination, christmas-y more like. But there was nothing content or joyous in them. Shikamaru couldn't help but think that those eyes were the last thing that many, many dead men had seen.

It petrified him.

"Or, you could go over there." He said back to Neji, trying to conceal the irritation he felt at the demand.

"Me? Why can't you do it?"

"I've already tried that a few times before, it didn't make any difference. Maybe you could come at it from another angle that would make them respond better."

"Oh please." Neji flipped the hair out of his face again. "If you insist on being the dominate one in this relationship then you need to accept the roles. That includes you being the one to stand up to people that piss me off."

"Or we could just be equal, you know. We don't have to be like every other gay couple."

"You know it would happen despite that. It's human nature."

"Ugh, such a draaag.." Shikamaru moaned. Neji just snorted and turned off the lamp.

A/N- Baah, Yea, that is not the end. Don't fret. I'm actually going to do a multichaptered story on this one, per request of my wonderful bestie **fluffyisemo** . It's usually really hard for me to prolong a story, just because I'm in a certain mood when I write each story and if I don't finish it right then and there then who knows when I'll be able to get back into the same mood. It makes it really annoying, you see to try to continue a story in a different mindset than when you first started writing. Then the whole flow and mood of the story changes and I get unsatisfied with it and have to go back to what was already written and touch it up...

BUT! I digress...

I'm going to do multiple chapters. So remain calm. I'll try to do them relatively quickly because I know how torturous it is to sit and wait for someone to add to a story.

Mm, but anyway, hope you enjoy! REVIEW!

## Chapter 2

### Bad Neighbors

---

An extremely loud noise sent the spikey haired man bounding out of bed and to the window.

He nearly snarled at the glass, seeing that it was Hidan again.

"Damn it..." he said, rubbing his eyes. The man was over in the destroyed backyard doing God knows what up on the power lines. He was shouting something, as usual. Shikamaru hardly paid attention to anything that came out that sorry excuse for a person's mouth.

"Just ignore them *honey* ." He heard Neji mutter bitterly.

"Don't get cross. It's too early." Troublesome indeed, he thought. Those two were starting to affect his relationship, and that... that was a major drag. Not cool at all. Shikamaru threw the window open and leaned out. He liked to be woken up by the crisp morning air and fresh new clouds, but unfortunately today the air was filled with the stench of what he could only assume was burning flesh. He scowled up at the man dangling from the power lines, laughing maniacally. Even from the distance Shikamaru could see the large vein on his forearm as if it were about to burst with the electricity flowing through it. "Little early to be doing the angel dust... don't you think?" He muttered to the man. Shikamaru was no fool, not that even a fool couldn't figure it out. It was obvious that their neighbor did more drugs than he even knew existed. And the man was immortal, why the hell wouldn't he? It was human nature at its best, stupid, obnoxious, and self-destructive. He didn't even want to recall the first time Kakuzu had murdered him right there in the backyard for all to see. That had turned into one huge massive mess of a headache. Long story short, the local police force won't let him live it down.

Damn, it was such a hassle though... Shikamaru watched in boredom as finally the jashinist let go of the wire and fell limply to the concrete below. Surely his skull was caved in from the impact, he'd landed directly on it after all. He remained in a heap on the ground, and Shika could only roll his eyes and look away toward their front yard. Kakuzu's truck was gone, he must've left for work early this morning, which explained Hidan's early drug-use. He would be back up on his feet, completely healed in no time though, it should be a crime for such a terrible person to have the kind of powers he did.

He sighed and looked up to the spot along the wires where he'd been hanging from, the wires were all frayed. Good Lord it looked as if he'd actually chewed the damn thing. Great, he'd have to call the electric company and get ahold of the city, seeing as that was among the lines that carried the power to their house, and also because if Kakuzu got home and had to do it then it would just erupt into another giant ordeal that was just more trouble than it was worth.. His eyes flicked up to the sky again, at least the clouds were nice today...

"Fucking Psycho.." Neji murmured in his ear. He nearly jumped, he hadn't even heard his lover get up. He was peering out the window at the lifeless pile of bones and skin on the ground over Shikamaru's shoulder.

"Swearing doesn't suit you." He replied to him, straightening up and stretching.

Neji stood with him and pecked him on the cheek before turning and dashing into the bathroom. "I can't help it.. The man is infuriating."

"He looked more like a monkey just now actually.."

"He probably *is* more ape than human.." Neji called back.

Shikamaru just pinched the bridge of his nose, he was so tired. It would surely affect his work performance, as it had since those maniacs had moved in. Rare were the days when he could actually

go to sleep at a decent time and sleep soundly through the night without being woken up by explosions or screaming or some other manner of stupidity. And even worse yet, his boss was clearly starting to notice. Asuma was more than understanding, but there couldn't be too many slipups working in the field that he did.

"So, have you found anything out on the bomb-threat?" Neji said loudly over the sound of the shower, as if reading his mind.

Shikamaru shook his head, he had a damn good idea who it was. One of Hidan's friends, just as psycho as him. It seemed as if every lunatic in the world had followed those two to their quiet little town. He'd only ever seen her from a distance, but something struck him as just plain off about her. Her demeanor and most especially her voice gave him the impression that she might just possibly be a drag queen...

Either way, she was always lighting firecrackers and making these wierd little clay sculptures and blowing them up in the back yard. He really couldn't determine if it was odd or not, really. Hidan didn't act like a man who preffered other men, he appeared as heterosexual as anyone. (Even though he knew throughly that he was not. He'd been kept up many a night to the nightmareish sounds he could only deduce to be sex coming from their house.) And here was this girl who by all means looked like a girl but came off as a boy...

And he'd even thought throughly that maybe it *was* a boy. But he had friends that were just about as gay as it gets, and even they didn't have hair that long and shiny and just so damn *blonde* .

"Shika, I asked if you found anything out." Neji called again, and snapped him out of his thoughts. He inhaled deeply as he saw Hidan's body finally start to twitch back to life.

"No," he exhaled, "I don't think it will amount to anything anyway. It was just gossip..." He trailed off, rubbing his tired eyes. "I think they're giving me crap cases on purpose.."

"Well it's not your fault you're too exhausted to think straight lately.."  
Neji said, the shower nob squeaking as he turned the water off.

He grunted a response, damn they were so troublesome.

He turned, suddenly realizing he didn't even know what time it was, and found it to be 5:30 in the morning. He groaned and slapped his hand to his face. He's gotten less than two hours of sleep, and didn't have to be at work for three hours. There was no way he was getting back to sleep, not now that Neji was already up and preparing for the day.

He heard a high pitched howl from the window and scowled. He didn't bother turning to go look, it was probably the drugged up idiot doing something else stupid and destructive.

*"I will FUCK YOU UP bitch!"*

He straightened, determined not to obsess over what the zealot was doing, but he couldn't resist his own curiosity. If the man was going to get in a fight he wanted to see if he'd actually put forth effort. Then he'd finally know what he was capable of. However, his glance out the window only resulted in his spirits lowering even more.

He was yelling at a bird. A fucking bird. Shikamru rolled his eyes for the millionth time, but continued watching despite himself. It was a black bird, a raven maybe.

*" You think you can just sit there and fucking mock me like that. I'LL KILL YOUR FAMILY! Oh, no wait, YOU ALREADY DID!"*

He raised a brow and watched the bird, he would almost swear it was carrying on an actual conversation with the guy. But all he saw was squawking and wings flapping.

"What the hell is he doing now?" Neji said, suddenly beside him again.

"Threatening to kill a birds family.." He replied, trying to hide the surprise from Neji sneaking up yet again. "But apparently the bird already killed it's own family. Sounds like something for The Maury Show."

He heard Neji laugh, "Are you serious? He's almost entertaining sometimes... as much as I hate to say." Shikamaru nodded in agreement, and Neji continued. "I much prefer him acting like that than anything else though. Always destroying stuff... Oh God he's looking over here get away from the window!" Neji pulled Shikamaru away, to his discontent. But it was for the best, he assumed, he needed to use the time he had getting ready for the day and preparing his mind. God forbid the cops ever figure anything out on their own. Just about any call they got was forwarded to the firm where he worked. It was just another example of human nature. Too lazy to do the work but they would sure as hell accept the credit.

*"Dammit. Alright I'm fucking coming. Tell them to keep their fuckin' panties on."*

"I think the bird was some kind of jutsu..." Neji said, Shikamaru already had the water running again. He really wanted to get his mind off this stuff, Neji could tell. He received no reply and let the matter drop, he knew that the Nara boy was always under a lot of mental stress, most of it was his own doing. He was outwardly lazy but his mind was always racing, always analyzing and watching and deducing theories and replacing them when he gained further knowledge all in mere seconds.

Hidan was making his way back inside now, the movement brought Neji out of his thoughts. He was starting to feel like such a damn creeper, watching them all the time. Well, not really *them* because Kakuzu at least seemed to try to keep to himself. And it was better, Neji didn't think he could handle the pair together... One was terrifying and the other was... also scary but in a different way. He was more scared of Hidan in the way that the man was basically unharmable. He could literally be ripped to peices and still recover while laughing the whole time. It just wasn't natural, and there were a



lot of unnatural things about the world that Neji could still accept with ease.

Hidan stopped in his tracks and turned his head, looking directly at Neji. He felt himself tense up at the stare, and Hidan grinned and stuck out his tongue, making made sexual gestures. He quickly slammed the window shut and drew the shade, taking a deep breath.

"Fucking psycho..." He muttered...

---

It had been an unbearably slow day, Shikamaru felt as if he was falling asleep every time he stood still for more than a moment. His eyes were red and teary from yawning constantly, and he had a screaming headache. He silently prayed that Neji would be out of the house, he just wanted to be alone for awhile, and break out his pipe. He deserved it, in his opinion. He'd been putting up with quite a bit for awhile, the stupid neighbors were one thing, but Neji's constant complaints and comments were just about driving him crazy. He thought, if he had to hear that man bitch about it one more time he'd probably scream. But... he thought that just about every day, and it hadn't happened yet.

He shook his head to clear the thoughts away. He didn't like being tired, it fogged his mind, and that made him anxious. He didn't like being confused, that left room for error, and error should always be avoided whenever possible, in any situation. One would never think he had such a perfectionist way of thinking unless they could actually see into his head. Neji probably knew, he was a genius after all, not even self-proclaimed either. But other than that, most people thought he was an easy going, lazy, stoner. That last part may or may not be true, it wasn't in his opinion, because he controlled his habit, he didn't have to be high at every possible second that it was available. But he did enjoy the green. Quite well. It allowed him to relax mentally, something he didn't feel like he needed to explain to anyone, and so didn't.

He was ripped suddenly from thought as someone suddenly collided with the concrete in front of his car. His foot slammed onto the breaks so hard that he winced and may have cried out if he hadn't been distracted by his head smashing violently into the steering wheel. The tires screeched in protest but the car stopped, and Shikamaru sat there breathing heavily, staring ahead at the edge of the hood, saying silent prayers that whoever it was would stand up.

It took exactly 5 heartbeats before a pale hand finally reached up and slapped onto the hood, and Shikamaru was immediately seething as he saw the forest green nail polish and the ring. He gripped the steering wheel so hard he thought he might break his own fingers as he watched the Jashinist pull himself up. The man's hair was thoroughly messed and his jaw was hanging at a grotesque angle. He reached up and snapped it back into the correct spot with a sickening pop, and smirked at Shikamaru.

"S'up?"

His eyes narrowed. The guy had almost just gotten run over, and Shikamaru probably had a concussion, and that was all he said? He sat there for a moment, dumb-founded, thinking briskly of the repercussions of just running him over right now. There probably wouldn't be any, except making an enemy out of Hidan, and that was just a possibility. After all, he lived with a man who frequently killed him...

He took a deep breath and reluctantly opened his door and got out before slamming the shifter into park. He calmly shut the door behind him and then leaned on the hood, eyeing Hidan with both brows raised, silently asking him what the hell he was doing. Hidan seemed to be enjoying it, and only stared back with that stupid grin on his face. The Nara was very close to losing his patience.

Hidan started smoothing his hair, *"Fucking Uchiha, they can't ever take a joke. Seriously."* He said it in a way that implied Shikamaru had an idea as to who he was talking about. It took his sleep-deprived brain a few seconds to realize that he *did* know the

Uchiha's. Well, one of them at least. Sasuke was the same age as him and had been in his class before dropping out. There were all kinds of rumors as to where he ended up, but he honestly didn't really find any of them to be logical. He may not have known Sasuke well, but he was damn sure he didn't join the circus or start his own brothel...

Yes, rumors were just about the most senseless thing on the planet.

"Who?" He asked, knowing full well that Sasuke couldn't possibly be making trips back to town, and most certainly wouldn't be associating with someone like Hidan.

"Me." Came a voice from behind him. Shikamaru whirled around, pulling out his knife on instinct. It was caught by an almost feminine looking hand and quickly removed from his possession with ease, And Shikamaru found himself inches away from a man who was clearly not Sasuke, but also clearly possessed the Sharingan.

There was a staring match for what Shikamaru counted out to be ten seconds. He quickly figured out who it was and because of that decided not to speak until spoken to. The man finally looked away from him and up to Hidan, his eyes fading to sheer black.

"Next time you think about pissing me off, Hidan, I will make sure the car doesn't stop."

*"Tch, you fuckers never seem to listen. I told you, it won't do shit but get me hard."*

Shikamaru rolled his eyes, as he did so the man that had just been standing inches from him exploded into a bunch of crows. He held up his hands protectively but in his surprise stumbled backward, only managing not to fall by the side mirror of his car.

" *Shit kid, he ain't that scary.*" Hidan said, staring at him with that damned amused grin. Shikamaru didn't reply, he didn't want to have a conversation with him, or anyone. He just wanted to go home and-

*"So you wanna get high?"*

"WHAT?" Shikamaru said, or yelled more like, looking around for anyone who might hear.

*"C'mon, seriously. You don't have to act all innocent. I ain't gonna snitch on you. Besides aren't you technically some kind of cop? You're allowed to bend the rules."*

"How do you even-"

*"I know more than you think I know. I'm not fucking stupid."*

'Could've fooled me..' Shikamaru thought to himself.

*"So? Yes or no? I'm doing it regardless so I don't really give a fuck, I'm just trying to be a nice guy. I am nice, you know, when you give me the chance. But seriously, I got shit that'll make you never wanna be sober again."*

Shikamaru was speechless. Not so much at the offer, but because he realized that he actually wanted to take him up on it. And not for the reasons everyone would assume, he had a plan. He always had a plan.

He looked back and forth from his house to Hidan's, mind going a mile a minute. There were so many uncertain variables, he needed to figure everything out while his head was still functioning correctly and play them in his mind a few times so he would automatically know what to do in each scenario, stoned or not. Several things could go badly, and that would be a mega drag...

"Well..." He said, Hidan's eyebrows raised expectantly and his grin grew even more.

A/N- Bahahaha! It feels so good to do a cliffhanger, oh man haven't written on of those in forever! But yea, I told you I'd try to update fast and surely the next day is fast enough for you. Heh, Honestly I'm just

super-inspired and I want to write as much as possible before it goes away.

Anywhosen, REVIEW!

# Chapter 3

## Bad Neighbors

---

The house was empty. Why was the house empty?

Neji stopped for a moment, brows furrowed, then moved briskly back to the back door and glanced out the screen.

His car was here... so why was the house empty? He hadn't told him about any plans to go anywhere, and that man didn't do anything without planning. Neji bit his lip, he knew the house was empty, he did. But the human mind liked to play tricks, and he bit his lip.

He could call out for him, but that would send warning...

Suddenly angry, Neji stormed to the bedroom and kicked open the door, just barely keeping his accusing shouts inside. And luckily for him he did, and a wave of relief washed over him. Now he just felt silly, Good thing no one was around to see that. However, his relief vanished suddenly. What if someone else picked him up? Neji pulled out his phone and unlocked it, flipping through his contacts until he came to his lovers name, complete with a little heart made out of a greater than sign and a three. His finger hovered over the dial button.

No... He was too smart for that. He wouldn't just leave his car here unless... Unless he wanted Neji to go looking for him. Ahah, it was a message.

Either that or he was on a walk... He did that sometimes.. But he always left a note so his over-jealous boyfriend wouldn't have fits like he had just had.

Okay, so he couldn't be on a walk. So where was-

Neji heard an engine next door and automatically turned to look. Of course, he thought, Shikamaru had gone to talk to Kakuzu like he'd asked. Neji just started to take in a breath to recollect himself when he made it to the window and saw the creator of the noise.

Kakuzu was getting out of the car.

What the hell? Okay, so obviously he wasn't over there talking to him.

"Damn you and you're games." He muttered hitting the call button and putting the phone up to his ear, still staring intently at his older neighbor now making his way up to the front door.

"Why doesn't he park in the driveway?" He muttered to himself, absently listening to the the phone ring.

---

*When I see your face! There's not a thing that I would change, cause girl you're amazing, just the way you are...*

"Whuzzat?" Shikamaru said.

"I didn't say shit man."

"Why are you singing?"

"I'm not fucking singing dude!"

*And when you smile, the whole world stops and stares for awhile..*

"That's coming from you fucker."

"Really?"

Shikamaru shifted and the song got louder, and finally he realized it was his phone. His eyes went wide, "Shit, what time is it?" He struggled to get the phone out of his pocket, that was Neji's ringtone, it suddenly occurred to him.

"Fuckin' time for you to leave, sounds like." Hidan said, grinning wildly. "That's your boy-toy ain't it?" Shikamaru locked eyes with him for a moment, and he was uncomfortable with the way the Jashinists eyes looked... hungry, at the mention of his boyfriend. And he remembered now that this was the psycho next door, not a friend. He also remembered why he'd come here.

*Yeah, baby you're amazing, Just the way you are!*

He flipped the phone open just before the song ended and it went to his voicemail.

"This is Nara." He answered, then regretted it. Neji knew he had a special ringtone on Shika's phone, and therefore would know it was him calling, and wouldn't have answered in that way.

"Okay Nara. Where the hell are you?"

Damn, there was strike one. He tried to think of an excuse, but his drug heavy brain seemed like it was running two miles and hour.

"Hanging out with a, erm, friend." Ah, damn it all, Why'd he have to studder?

"A friend? Shikamaru Nara? Is that really who you're with? Just a friend?"

Strike two. He tried to jumpstart his brain with chakra, he had this all planned out, and now he couldn't remember a single fucking thing. Damn it, damn it all to hell. This was why he hated being tired, then he made mistakes. It had been a small mistake at first, but now it was a big mistake. No, nonono, don't panic; He told himself. Panicing would only make things worse, Aw shit, if he didn't say something in the next three milli-second-

"You're damn right I'm a friend!" Hidan said loudly, loudly enough for Neji to hear it clearly over the phone.



Shikamaru clenched his entire face. There goes strike three. Fuck, why'd he have to be with the sharpest tack in the town? He could see Neji's face, plain as day, he was looking out the window right now, and his eyes were wide as he realized who's voice that was. Then they squinted in anger as he would recall Hidan's offer last night, and Shikamaru's interest. And Shikamaru's behaviour would suddenly make sense. He opened his eyes to glare daggers at Hidan, who only seemed proud of himself. 'He probably thinks he's defending me,' Shikamaru thought, 'what a fucking drag.'

"Are you kidding me right now?" Neji's voice said quietly over the phone, so Hidan wouldn't hear. "You better be home in the next 5 minutes to explain, or don't come home at all."

Shikamaru expected to hear the click to end the call, but it dragged on a few moments more with the slightest fuzzy noise.

"Kakuzu is getting ready to walk in the door." Neji said, and then the click came.

This statement, while on the one hand bringing great relief to him for the fact that Neji was assuming that he had everything under control, and probably had some kind of convoluted plan to sabotage the neighbors so they'd move away or something to that effect, and therefore wasn't as mad at him as he seemed.

He heard what was unmistakably the front door opening.

And on the other hand, it also made him stiffen up, once again trying to remember what the plan called for if Kakuzu came home. Honestly he didn't know the man very well, but he knew he was terribly strong and extremely violent when he was upset. At this point he had two choices, and he didn't like either of them, damn that fucking marijuana, it had to be laced with something.

He could make a run for it, even though Kakuzu likely already knew he was here, after all the man *had* to be a jutsu user, no mere human possessed the power to rip another human limb from limb

with their bare hands without some kind of extra something. And if he was a jutsu user it was safe to assume he could sense chakra, and Shikamaru, in his current state, hadn't had it masked in the least.

That brings him to the second option, which was to stay and pretend like he was just hanging out with Hidan. Which, as far as the albino knew, was what he was actually doing. The fact that he *wasn't* trying to hide his presence would keep the older member of the household from thinking he was a threat.

He heard heavy footsteps, and they were definitely coming this way.

Fuck, his head was suddenly throbbing again as the choice was made for him.

"You're a jumpy little shit huh? Just chill, seriously. " Hidan said nonchalantly just as the door into the garage was opened. Shikamaru was first regarded with those creepy eyes, and he couldn't seem to detect any emotion on the man's face at all.

"Hey babe!" Hidan chirped, "How was woork?"

Kakuzu remained still and silent for a few heartbeats, And shikamaru found it terribly exhausting to not be able to determine what the man was thinking. He seemed to be considering something, and finally he took another step forward and closed the door behind him.

"It was work." He said, finally breaking eye contact with Shikamaru and walking in to sit next to Hidan. The Nara felt himself relax visibley. But he didn't care, those few seconds that had passed between the phone call and Kakuzu coming in had been by far the most exhausting moments of his life in a long, long while.

"But how was it?" Hidan said, his voice in a higher pitch than usual. He shifted so that he was still sitting normally, but his upper body was twisted toward and leaned on his lovers shoulder.

"Don't start with me Hidan." He warned, shoving him off and reaching for the bong. He kept giving Shikamaru those void glances, and the younger man couldn't really decipher if Kakuzu wanted to say something, or was waiting for him to.

"What are you up to?" He asked immediately after taking a hit. Shika was at a loss for words, he hadn't said it in a way as to mean "How are you?" or "What's up?" No, the way he clearly defined the words was more of a "Why are you here and what are you planning?" He thought briefly that the old man could see right through him, but it occurred to him once again that he was probably acting incredibly suspicious. It didn't help that Kakuzu knew about the negative feelings He and his lover shared about Hidan, and now was spontaneously sitting in his house doing drugs with the lunatic.

"Tch, Don't be a fucking grump Kakuzu I'm trying to make peace here." Hidan closed his eyes as he said it and waved his hand weakly at Shikamaru, and Kakuzu narrowed his eyes at him as well. And the Nara found it deeply uncomfortable that he would see the faintest hints of a smirk behind the mask. "We found something we have in common and we're indulging the fuck out of it. "

Kakuzu just grunted while Hidan continued to sit in silence and grin at Shikamaru. He was just about to give in and ask what the grin was about when Hidan spoke first. "So, don'tcha gotta go home?"

Shikamaru mumbled a profanity and suddenly stood up. "That's right..." He was about to scurry out the door when he turned back to the psycho who didn't seem all that psycho at the moment. "Thanks man... I needed that."

Hidan just shrugged, and Shikamaru proceeded out the garage door, into the house, and was about to leave when something caught his eye. He took a step backwards, and there on what he assumed to be a bedroom door was a well-polished pendant of a circle with an upside-down triangle inside. Shikamaru had seen this on several occasions, the glint of it always caught his eye when he was watching Hidan's shenanigans from the window. The man always

wore a necklace just like it, and he immediately connected that it must be a symbol of that God he worshipped. It was the same as a crucifix for a christian. His legs itched to take a step toward it, to take a peek inside the room, but his head was still swirling, and he knew that doing so would be a mistake. He did make a mental note to look more into this Jashin fellow Hidan spoke so devoutly of. When he was sober... that is. But for now, it was back home to be berated thoroughly just before he could explain what was going on, or at least, explain his cover story for Neji. The man may very well be a genius but there were some things he was just better off not knowing.

---

"Don't fucking look at me like that, I told you everything before you signed up for this shit."

"You're going to get caught."

"Like hell I am."

"You have no idea what he's capable of Hidan. "

"Since when are you a fucking psychic? Fuck off old man, I know what I'm doing. Besides, what's gonna happen? They gonna throw me in prison? HAH! Bunch of douchebags."

"If you have any brain at all in that head you'll watch your step around those two. It may be a game to you.."

"It's not a fucking game. It's my identity. This isn't a fucking crap shoot Kakuzu. Stop treating me like a brainless shithead. I'm not fucking stupid."

"We'll see then, won't we?"

---

A/N- Hmm. This was harder than I thought it would be...

So! to anyone still reading, I'd like to inform you that this random drabble/crack has actually turned into a real story with an actual plotline. And with any luck, it will be a good one. I'm trying *really* hard, unfortunately I'm just not as awesome as Shikamru therefore could never capture his real character, but damn I sure am putting for a good fucking effort. Hopefully I won't make it too predictable, but I probably will...

.\_. Anyway, thanks for reading aaaaand REVIEW!

## Chapter 4

### Bad neighbors

"Shikamaru. Look at this." Neji flipped the newspaper out to straighten it so that the center of focus would be on one certain column.

"Can you just read it to me?" He said dryly as he brushed his hair up in order to put it in his normal ponytail. He didn't think it was possible, yet every day he felt farther and farther from reality. This morning he had literally nodded off while standing in the bathroom waiting for the shower water to get warm. The bags under his eyes made him look almost skeletal. And he was possibly more annoyed with the neighbor than before. The man had acted so normal while they were 'hanging out', and for most of the day after that he hadn't seen him at all. It wasn't until Shikamaru had *just* lay down and shut his eyes that he heard the infernal whooping and howling of a drug-heavy Hidan. He'd clenched his eyes shut as tight as they would go and repeated to himself over and over again to ignore it, to just ignore it and it would go away, but the damn jashinist had sounded like he was literally right outside the window. Finally Shikamaru had been forced to get up, get dressed, go outside and force the drug addict into holding still with his jutsu. He held him there until the man passed out right there in the yard.

To make matters even worse Neji had woken him up with an alarmed shout. Next thing he knew they were both up and out of the bed, Neji was frantically trying to explain to him that Hidan had been standing at the edge of the bed watching him sleep. It had taken almost an hour to calm his lover down and finally convince him that it was just a dream, he'd had to force him to look out the window to see a still sleeping albino in the yard across the street.

The brunette seemed to have forgotten about it completely now, or he was masking it incredibly well.

"Another person was found dead, this time over in Baker county." Shikamaru could only half pay attention to his boyfriend as the shaved with the movement of a sloth. "It was a woman this time, 'well known as a practitioner of ninjutsu,' it says. She was only twenty-six..."

"Homicide?" Shikamaru slurred, rinsing his face.

"Mmhmm. They think it was the same person. They're trying to pass a petition against publicly using jutsu because of it."

"It'll never happen."

"I know that, I was just telling you. Why haven't they stuck you on this yet?"

"Because it hasn't reached our district I would assume. Not our district, not their problem."

"You need to look into it on your own then. People are being murdered Shika."

"Neji." Shikamaru said, failing to hide the irritation in his voice. "I would love to help every little Bo peep find their sheep, you know I would, but I don't have the time or the energy and I don't get paid for jobs they don't assign me and they don't pay expenses for it. That comes out of my pocket, of *our* pocket."

"So you're going to let young people with their entire lives ahead of them be killed and go on your merry little way because you don't get money out of it?" Neji said, matching Shikamaru's condescending tone.

"I have a better idea. Why don't you fucking do it? You *are* the prodigy child, are you not?"

"I'm not the one killing people. I don't have the strategic mind to put the dots together the way you do. All I can do is try to encourage the

people who actually can do something about it, *to* do something about it. " Neji snapped. The two glared at each other for a heartbeat, before Neji's features relaxed and he took a deep breath. He had opened his mouth to undoubtedly apologize, But Shikamaru wasn't in the mood.

"Just stop meddling." He said before snatching his coat. "More trouble than it's worth." He made a beeline to the door, ignoring Neji's sounds of revived anger. If he didn't leave now, he had a feeling he might come close to actually snapping. He didn't want that, losing control of himself meant losing control of his life in every situation that occurred within it. He needed to do something, he thought to himself as he got into his car. He didn't know if he was referring to his life, or the obvious jutsu killer on the loose, but he could be absolutely certain that he needed to do something.

As he pulled out of the driveway, a gleam caught his eye and drew his attention to the neighbors backyard. Hidan was sitting up now, crosslegged with his elbows perched on his knees and his chin resting on his fists, grinning as always. Shikamaru kept staring, as if the man would give him the answers he was looking for. Slowly, Hidan removed one hand and held his hand out, palm facing forward and wiggled his fingers in a wave.

Shikamaru grimaced, and slammed the gear into the drive position and, grumbling to himself, started heading for work.

---

The moment his lover had left, Neji was at the window. He was mad at Shika, yes, but not as pissed as he was at the neighbors. It was their fault the poor man was in the condition he is. The lunatic living next to them didn't seem to have a job at all, so of course he was up at all hours of the night, honestly, Neji didn't even know if he ever slept.

Shikamaru didn't like to make enemies, but there was no way this could keep going on, His man needed rest, and if Shika didn't have the anger to fuel him, then the job landed at Neji's feet. Surely he



could take that albino idiot, he would just wait until the man had himself so drugged up that he barely seemed human, and he would make a move. He just had to make sure that it wouldn't 'start a war' as Shikamaru said. Anything that started conflict was a war to him. He really was such an easygoing, simple guy at heart. People liked to accuse him of being selfish or lazy, those who dared got tongue-lashing from Neji. He knew better. People just needed to learn to see past the surface, so much pain could be avoided that way...

Now, back to Hidan... Who was still sitting in the same spot but had got up on his knees and was currently bent over digging a hole with nothing but his hands. Now, Neji knew that he had to be *some* sort of Jutsu user, but for the life of him he couldn't figure it out. He'd never actually seen the man use his chakra for anything except the surge that happened when the man was passed out, most often temporarily dead, that helped him to heal with ungodly speed. And even that was a puzzle, because the man was quite literally dead when it happened, and he still *had* chakra. He could see with Byakugan, the man had no heartbeat, no brain activity (though that was normal), blood flow had ceased, he was completely and utterly dead, though his life energy still remained in his body.

It was a puzzle worthy of Shikamaru's skills, but Neji was stuck with his own.

So, the man enjoyed pain, and couldn't die, so there really was no threatening his life to make him behave... one couldn't torture him. The only person he was romantically involved with murdered him on a regular basis, and honestly Neji could only think of maybe threatening *his* life. But there was no way in hell he was going to do that, just hearing the sounds emitted from that house when those two fought made him sick to his stomach. He'd honestly be more willing to fight the immortal one over Kakuzu.

So basically the only way to really do anything to the man was to trap him in something he couldn't escape from until he broke mentally. More than he was already, that is. So, that was the only option, he obviously had to go with it, however, it had to be done in a

way that would not leave any loose ends. Shikamaru wouldn't leave loose ends, and so neither could he. That meant he would have to interact with Kakuzu in some way, shape, or form. But from what Shika had told him, he didn't think he'd have a problem convincing the older man to let him 'train' Hidan to behave better.

He glared out the window, and just then the zealot looked up and smirked. But Neji just narrowed his eyes, if he made another sexual gesture, he was going to go out there and... and... do *something* .

Hidan lifted his hand and gave him the same flirtatious wave he'd given his boyfriend, but then added on the national hand signal for 'Call me' at the end. Neji rasponded with a single finger, which Hidan was unfazed by, he seemed entertained even. He held his hand to his mouth and made a shocked face, then mimed out his heart breaking in half with his hands, his features in a pout.

Neji growled and slammed his fist onto the windowseal. That was it, stupid fucker, he was going to go out and..and... just punch him. Punch him until he felt better, didn't matter to Hidan right? He'd probably enjoy it, just as long as it made Neji feel better. He stormed out of his room, through the dining room, into the livingroom and out the front door. Hidan was giving him an amused smile, watching him with those mutant purple eyes as he moved.

"You piece of shit!" Neji called, "I'm gonna rip your fucking head off!"

"Oooh, Me-ow!" Hidan said, clawing at the air. Neji stomped over to him and retracted his arm, Hidan licked his lips and was about to say something when he was jabbed in the chest by Neji's gentle fist.

"OH, fuck me silly!" He cried, half in pain and half in pleasure. "Didn't see that shit coming... " He rasped, and Neji smiled, retracting his arm again. But suddenly Hidan was gone, jumping up and flipping over the brunette and behind him in just a split second. And suddenly a blade pressed against his jugular and an arm was wrapped around the shoulder of the hand he was going to strike with. Then he was being squeezed to the point where he had to bit his lip not to cry out,

he had severely underestimated Hidan's strength, when the hell did the guy get the time to keep himself this physically strong?

"Let me go you fucking psycho!" Neji snarled, squirming in futility. "Shikamaru will-"

"Will what princess? Arrest me? Send me to jail?" Hidan said gently, too gently, in his ear. "He and I are buddies now, haven't you heard?"

Neji clenched his jaw and craned his neck away from Hidan. How had he even gotten into this situation? He had only been standing safely inside his house a moment ago...

"That being so.." Hidan pulled away, "I'm not gonna fuck with his bitch. No matter how delicious they look. How much do you think your soul is worth, Hyuga?"

Neji flailed again, this time getting loose only because Hidan's grip had slackened. "Stay the fuck away from him." Neji growled, turning to face him but backing away. "Leave him alone, leave *us* alone. You're making his life miserable and I'm not going to stand and watch it happen much longer. The next time you keep him up all night you're going to wake up six feet under the ground, broken into a million peices." Neji's expression visibley changed as he realized what he had said, good God that was perfect! His satisfaction only increased as Hidan's grin finally vanished, but it was a momentary victory.

"You don't wanna piss me off, princess. I'm not fucking stupid, and you have no idea what you're in for if you piss me off." He had started toward Neji as he spoke, the lines in his face that were usually creased into a smile were now set in another emotion somewhere between anger and something akin to lust.

" *HIDAN!*"

Neji jumped at the sudden outburst and whipped his head around. Kakuzu had somehow snuck up behind him and was standing there

with his arms crossed over his chest, multi-colored eyes glaring daggers. Neji's heart was racing to the point where he was having trouble making it seem like he wasn't terrified.

Kakuzu said nothing, and Hidan just glared back at him, pigment-free eyes flicking back and forth between Neji and his... whatever he was.

Finally Hidan's demeanor did a complete 360 .

"Aww, C'mon Kuzu I was just teching this little bitch to have some respect." he whined, Kakuzu's only movement was the rise and fall of his chest.

"You have to give respect before you can receive it, Hidan."

"Tch, fucking old man, why don't you go knit a sweater."

Neji couldn't hardly believe his eyes at the scene that occurred next. He heard a gasp that he realized came from himself only after it was all said and done. He wasn't even sure what had just happened aside from Kakuzu side-stepping out from behind him with controlled slowness. And then suddenly, though Hidan was a good 6 feet away, he was suddenly being held up in the air by his throat by a man who had done nothing more than lift his arm.

"You insufferable brat. You have been warned by them and now you have been warned by me. Keep your nonsense down to a minimum or your life will come to an abrupt end."

"Ph... phug off, Kah-kuzoo.." Hidan forced out, his legs flailing beneath him.

Kakuzu loosened his grip and Hidan fell heavily to the ground, coughing and rubbing his neck.

"Both of you *children*, " The older man growled, "Get off my lawn."

---

Neji could hardly remember the rest of that day. He floated through it as if in a dream, he was vaguely aware of doing the dishes, and he thought maybe he washed some laundry. But he honestly couldn't recall if the encounter with the neighbors had really happened, or if it had been some fantasy imagined up by his subconscious mind.

He continued glancing out the window, and saw no sign of the jashinist. Apparently Kakuzu had gotten the message across, he thought to himself, deciding finally that yes, it *had* really occurred.

The neighbors backyard looked almost barren without that man wreaking havoc in it. And to be honest, Neji thought maybe he was even a little bored, now that there was nothing to keep his attention. He glanced up to the clock, it read thirty past four. He didn't know what significance this had, Shikamaru never really had a pre-determined time to be home from work. Technically he could go home at five, but most days he stayed behind, once the man was absorbed into something it was hard to break his concentration. Neji also had the sneaking suspicion that maybe he napped in the office after everyone else left. He couldn't blame him really, though it irritated the hell out of him.

Suddenly a car pulled up to the neighbors house, Neji didn't recognize it, though it was surely one of Hidan's friends, and sure enough all of Hidan's associates climbed out after the engine stopped humming. Such a strange group of friends.. Neji thought. The blonde girl that Shikamaru thought might be a guy that could be much older than them. Sasuke's older brother, who had never really showed his face until just the other day when the incident occurred that Neji refused to speak of. And now there was this short red-headed fellow who he'd never seen before. He looked like he was about to keel over and die of severe boredom...

Hidan, of course, looked over directly at Neji, he smiled as he always had as if nothing had ever happened, and Neji frowned, but didn't look away. He refused to let Hidan know he was afraid of him, the man would undoubtedly abuse the knowledge. What peaked his interest as well as annoyance was when Hidan muttered something to

the blonde girl and nodded his head toward their house, and she followed his gaze over and met Neji's eyes. She grinned the same grin as Hidan, and in that instant Neji could understand what Shikamaru meant when he spoke of her.

She really *did* kind of seem like a guy...

That didn't matter though, he was irritated now, he needed to know what Hidan was saying about him. He had no business spreading rumors to his friends, He didn't know Neji, he didn't... Wait. Maybe he was talking about Shikamaru.

Neji gasped, that's it! He invited all his friends over, and when Shikamaru got home he was going to invite him over too. He was going to try to get Shikamaru into his friend circle, and all because Neji had told him to stay away. The man was like a child being told no, he was seeing how far he could push Neji's patience.

"Son of a bitch." Neji said aloud, his sudden burst of anger almost causing real pain. "Over my dead body."

He quickly flipped out his phone and called Shikamaru. It rang, and rang... and rang... and finally went to voicemail.

"This is Nara, if it's not important, hang up now. Otherwise, leave a message, maybe I'll call you back."

So professional... Neji was irked that he didn't answer, but either he had fallen asleep at his desk, or he was incredibly busy. He would call back later, he would keep calling until he answered so he could warn him. That was the only way he could reach him first, seeing as they were on a lot next to a Co-op, and the only road that led to their house was the one that went in front of Hidan and Kakuzu's first in either direction. There was a chance that he was wrong, but he'd be damned if he was going to let it go, he'd rather look like a complete idiot than let that man try to steal Shika away.

"Hey, call me back, " He paused for a moment, thinking over what he should say. "I think Hidan is up to something, I wanted to give you a heads up." He wished he hadn't said it as soon as it left his mouth. He knew He complained about the neighbor more than was healthy, and he knew that shikamaru had been tolerating it only for the sake of keeping the peace. But they way things were when he left for work this morning... it probably wasn't a good idea to mention the neighbors. He should have just said it was important. Shika would have still been mad, but at least that way he would have actually called back...

"... Love you. Bye."

He hung up, and glared out the window. He'd wait here the entire time to make sure Hidan didn't pull anything. He didn't care if it took 5 minutes or 5 hours, no one fucked with his man.

---

A/N- Daamn, drama. Lol, well, i was really wanting to keep this so it was still a comedy, and maybe, depending on your sense of humor, some of you still laughed. ( I hope so, Dx ) But, aside from that, here's another chapter! Hope you enjoy! I used my precious saturday to stir this up for ya. n\_n

REVIEW!

## Chapter 5

A/N- Oh, I just realized I never said this in this story yet, but if it isn't completely obvious, I am not Kishimoto and therefore do not own Naruto or any of the characters. This is a fanfiction.

Also, I don't own Jashinism, I know nothing about it aside from that said on shippuden, nothing posted in this chapter is a fact, it's simply what I came up with for the sake of story progression. Flame me and be sacrificed.

---

### Bad Neighbors

Now this was interesting...

Shikamaru leaned slightly closer to the monitor, squinting to read the heavily scripted text.

*Jashinism requires unflinching devotion and a realization and willingness to give ones life at any moment that Jashin deems appropriate. Very few disciples ever live a long life, due to the daily requirements of such devotion.*

*Blood from the disciple is demanded daily to knull Jashin's hunger and to prove continuous loyalty. A minimum of one teaspoon demanded upon waking up to thank him for letting the disciple live to see another day. Another teaspoon must be given at the end of each day to give thanks for the day and anything it brought, and to assure waking again tomorrow morning. Traditionally, if anything especially good or bad happens through the day, a larger sacrifice is given either as thanks for the gift, or thanks for being able to live through it.*

"Troublesome.." Shikamaru muttered to himself as he read on further.



*Disciples of Jashin, like any religion, have different levels of devotion. Lowest are the mere followers, referred to as 'sheep'. Most of these individuals are forced into Jashinism by a stronger member in order to spare their lives and to keep the religion alive. They will follow the bare minimum of requirements.*

*Above them are what is referred to as the 'soldiers.' Most often these individuals will seek out others to convert, and also take said convertee under their wing to teach them and train them in the ways of Jashin. Refusal to join always results in death of one person or the other. Soldiers will not stop at any means until someone they deem worthy has either converted, or is dead.*

*Above soldiers are the 'Preachers.' These are the ones that organize, rule, and keep track of all the Jashinists within a certain area. They are in charge of punishing members that break unity with Jashin, forget the rules, overstep the boundaries of their devotion level, etc. They are also the ones who keep track of the deeds done by lower Jashinists, and declare when they are ready to move on to another level.*

This sounds more like organized crime than a religion, Shikamaru thought to himself, rubbing his eyes. He had been searching at every chance he got today for information on Hidan's religion, having remembered his self-note when he saw the pendant this morning. It had literally taken all day, but he finally found a site with in-depth information. His mind vaguely wondered if anything happened to the person who put all this up for the world to see, or if they higher-ups in this organization knew about it yet. It would take some serious gusto to try to go undercover as a member of these people...

*Above these are the 'Holy Priests'. Not much is known about these men. It is believed that there are less than 5 throughout the entire country, due to the requirements of this devotion level. Priests are required to make sacrifices, as are all other members, however, along with giving their own blood, they must sacrifice the soul of another sentient being. It is not known whether the requirements of*

*this actually refers to any living thing, or strictly humans, but there have been recorded murders linked directly to Jashinism.*

Shikamaru lifted one brow, recalling the string of homicides. This couldn't be a coincidence, he thought and read on further to find other similarities.

*The frequency with which these sacrifices must be made is unknown. Further investigation on the matter is strictly prohibited because of the high risk, and the low odds of being able to locate a High Priest. It is believed that the exceedingly low level of priests relates to psychiatric affects caused on the brain from continuous pressure to kill, but argued with this is that a Jashinist of such high level must be so hypnotized by this religion and possibly low blood count that the mind would be unable to think rationally, making morality obsolete.*

"Or because it's hard to find someone who is a masochist and a sadist at the same time..." Shikamaru whispered, Hidan's violet eyes flashing before him, that stupid smirk... "So basically, if you don't join them you die. But if you join, they hypnotize you into thinking pain feels good. And in turn you register that causing pain on others would feel just as good to them." Shikamaru was chewing his nails as he reread the text. "Which means the ones forced to join are relatively innocent, in a morbid way... but what would stop them from rising through the ranks?" He closed his eyes and shifted so that just the tips of his fingertips were touching each other.

*Awareness.* He thought with sudden clarity. Most human beings, no matter how corrupt or terrible they are, still feel guilt when taking the life anyone, even animals. Those that know they're killing, those that know it's wrong, and still enjoy it. Those that don't try to escape, those that don't choose death over the mental torture... those are the one's that get bumped up.

Shikamaru felt as if he'd just been punched in the gut when his cell went off. He looked at it blankly as Bruno Mars filled the office making the few others that were actually still working and not

hanging around waiting for 5 so they could leave, look up and stare at him.

How could such a religion even exist? It wasn't even a religion, it was a cult. The only way Jashin might differ from Satan is the straightforward way he commanded his followers to be evil. Why would anyone start such a thing? This, this exact reason right here, was why Shikamaru was an athiest. Yes, the human mind looked for reason to beleive that they're existance matters, and yes, humans had a habit of making things far more complicated than they had to be in our seach for understanding... And on several occasions Shikamaru himself had wondered briefly on things that couldn't be explained with logic. But situations like this, organizations, no, *fucking cults* that required one to not only physically harm yourself on a daily basis, but physically harm and *kill* others... Who the hell came up with this shit? It didn't even make sense? One single person on this Earth loved to hurt and kill himself and others so much that he made a fake god out of it to explain his behaviors. And other people decided not to let it die with just him...

Come to think of it, it hadn't even said anything about how long Jashinism had been around... Neji's ringtone finally fell silent and after a second the phone beeped to tell him he had left a voicemail. Shikamaru ignored it though, he really didn't want to talk to his partner in the mental state he was in right now, just disgusted with people. He put his hand back onto the mouse and scrolled down. There wasn't much left of the page. He squinted again to read through the strange font it was written in.

*It is said that those who manage to reach a devotion level of High priest, and then excel that, are granted with a special gift from Jashin. As of now, this has been unheard of, and is only a rumor.*

*-Updated 7 years ago by Guest*

So it had existed for, at the very least, 7 years... That didn't satisfy him at all. Shika pinched the bridge of his nose, the creaking of chairs and squeaking of doors and fluttering of paper was heard as

all his co-workers prepared to leave, but the sounds went unheard by the Nara.

This had been a mistake, he really shouldn't have started in on this. He shouldn't have gotten involved with Hidan, he should have left his psycho neighbor alone and went on believing that the man was just psychotic and nothing more. But honestly, it couldn't be as bad as he thought. Shikamaru was far from stupid, and his brain already made all the connections, the realization had hit him pretty much at once, but he wouldn't allow himself to make assumptions. He had actually never witnessed Hidan hurting anyone, or anything really, at least not anything alive. Kakuzu was almost constantly throttling him, but aside from trying to get away he really never fought back. He knew for a fact that Hidan was a Jashinist, he'd seen the pendant, he'd heard Hidan raving about the imaginary God, He'd seen him slit his own wrist and create that damn symbol on the ground and scream praise up to the skies with blood squirting out.

The man had to be more than just a 'follower' though, as he understood it, Hidan lost far more blood than was necessary to satiate the God. He wondered, briefly if he was a preacher. If that was the case, then befriending him had secretly been a brilliant idea. Perhaps in some drug-induced frenzy he could get the man to dish out names and meeting places, he would sure as hell get a raise for nailing an entire cult.

He laced his fingers together and stared at the text on the screen. This would be a mess even if it was pulled off flawlessly. He had no doubt that this was connected to the recent murders, and the fact that the neighbor that he once thought (and still did a little) think was a complete waste of life provided it to him was... too much of a coincidence.

He squinted at the realization, everyone had something to lose. Even someone like Hidan wouldn't be that careless, to just assume no one would hear of Jashin and not do research on it..

"UGH!" he cried, squeezing his head with his hands. "This could not possibly be more of a drag." The phone rang again, it was Neji. Shikamaru glared at it as if that would shut it up, then rolled his eyes and sighed, letting his shoulders and arms go limp. He would just keep calling until he answered, it must be important, or important to Neji at least. For all he knew he could be calling to ask which shade of blue he liked better to paint the living room. Yeah, he had actually done that.

He snatched up his phone and clicked the silent button. He didn't want to talk to Neji, he didn't want to talk to anyone. After the events of last night he didn't even want to indulge himself in the one thing that helped him relax. It seemed there was no room for relaxing anymore, his life, Neji's life, and the lives of other random jutsu users were all on his shoulder, and everyone expected him to come up with a magic cure to suddenly fix everyone and everything. He could feel his anger, somewhere in his chest, it wanted to break out and he wanted to go on a rampage. He wanted to mindlessly destroy and live in ignorance like everyone else, but he didn't have the heart.

He sighed again, and clicked the mouse a few times. Then he shut the monitor off, and the tower of the computer followed suit. He stood up, stretched, and started making his way to the front, flipping off the lights as he went. Today would be another long day, and tonight would most likely be even longer, he might as well get started.

---

"It's obviously another jutsu user, and a powerful one at that." The redhead said. "As far as we know they've taken 5 lives, and that's only as far as we know. "

"This person has most likely been killing for years.." Itachi Uchiha added, he was staring intently at some invisible object on the wall, his expression hard. "They grew bored with doing it the safe way, killing homeless stragglers and strangers that had no one to mourn for them. They tried something new, got away with it, and decided to keep going."

"Tch, I think everyone in this room is wondering if it's you 'Tachi."  
Hidan said obnoxiously. He received a blaring red glare in response.

"Have you forgotten my promise Hidan?"

"Aw chill out I'm just fucking with you."

"Itachi would know the best because of, uh, his history, hm?" The blonde one stated.

Itachi was still irritated but nodded to him. "Which is why I'm putting myself in charge of finding this person and putting a stop to it. Stunts like this are what end up starting a war."

"Why the hell isn't Kakuzu helping you? He's killed people before."

"Hm. Kakuzu killed out of self defense, moron."

"Don't think I won't rip your pretty fucking hair out Dei. Sasori control your woman."

"I'M NOT A FUCKING GIRL HMM!"

"Deidara and I aren't gay with each other you brat, for the millionth time. Just because you two are doesn't mean everyone has to be." the redhead retorted, fiddling boredly with a string hanging from his jacket.

Hidan began to say something but Itachi smacked his cheek rather hard, clearly trying very hard to control his anger. "Could you two, just once, act your age?" They both glared at each other, but said nothing. "This is a serious matter that needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible. It can't be allowed to go on any longer, they're already trying to put up laws against using jutsu."

"This is exactly the reason the Akatsuki was created. You two need to either get serious or quit, everyone is getting sick of your behavior."

"I'm sorry Sasori, hmm." Deidara said, hanging his head. Hidan just rolled his eyes, and muttered something under his breath.

"Why the fuck are we at my house today, and where the hell is everyone else?"

"Kisame and Zetsu are both out chasing leads. We are meeting here to be sure you'd actually show up." Itachi stated, staring blandly at Hidan.

"Why the fuck doesn't his majesty ever have to show up at these meetings?"

"He's busy doing more important things, that's why he got more members hm, so he didn't have to do everything himself! Show more respect Hidan, maybe you'd get more yourself yeah?" Deidara snapped, on the edge of his seat now but trying desperately to not start another bickering match on account of the look he was receiving from Sasori.

"You know you're the second fucker to say that today..." Hidan said sarcastically, "I don't know why you guys insist on giving me speeches that would be more useful as fucking toilet paper."

Deidara's eye twitched as he tried to control his rising anger. Itachi's voice intervened the inevitable renewed argument between the two.

"This might as well be a racial crime, and with the attention it's getting we're already going to have trouble getting people to cooperate."

"I'm pretty fucking sure I can persuade them to nark." Hidan's teeth showed as he talked, though not exactly in a smile.

"No." Itachi snapped, leaving Hidan to glare, arms crossed across his chest. "We cannot be protectors *and* bullies. Gaining trust is the most important thing here. We will have to question those closest to

the victims first, and they're emotions are going to be unstable. If you can't keep control of yours," His black eyes flicked back and forth between Hidan and Deidara. "Then we'll find something more useful for you to do."

"Like hold a bucket of sand in the corner." Sasori chuckled.

"I have a bottle of termites hidden somewhere in your room." Hidan said, his face uncomfortably serious, "All I have to do is break the glass, and you're in for the worst torture of your life."

"Hidan knock it off hm? Why do you always have to sling threats around?"

"Because, blondie, people don't *fuck* with you when they're afraid. See that's the problem with the dumbasses getting themselves killed, they don't know how to properly invoke fear, so they fucking die, as they should."

"SHUT UP YOU ALBINO FUCK!" Deidara barked, and Hidan responded by lunging for the youngest member with such force that the chair he was resting in was flipped rather violently backwards.

Sasori and Itachi exchanged tired glances before pulling themselves up and fighting to pull the two apart.

"Why are you even *in* this club? All you care about is yourself, hmmm!" Deidara squealed as he struggled to get out of Sasori's grip and claw at Hidan's face.

"You stupid living fucking barbie, If you'd stop pissing me off all the time I'd be a really nice fucking guy!" Hidan snarled back lifted his arms and slapping Itachi's down away from him. He stood in place for a few heartbeats giving Deidara a look that would leave him dead where he stands if looks could kill, then whirled around and started stomping out of the room. "Just fucking tell me what I need to do when you decide."



"Where can we find you?"

"Depends on where you fucking look." Hidan said before he slammed the door behind him.

Itachi and Sasori met eyes for a second before rolling them and shaking their heads.

"I told you we should have waited until his *master* was home, hm." Deidara growled quietly, squirming loose of Sasori and smoothing out his disheveled hair.

"Calm down, you two will be friends again by tomorrow." Sasori's slight smile showed, and Deidara saw it. "Oh shut up.." He muttered, smiling back despite himself

"This was a futile attempt anyway, we need everyone here before we can properly make plans. We'll wait for Him to cool off and for Kisame and Zetsu to get back, and then we can try again..." Itachi considered for a moment, "When Kakuzu isn't chasing bounties."

"It's him we really need anyway, he's the one with the most tracking experience, yeah?"

Itachi nodded, and turned to leave, his silent dismissal still lingering even after he was gone.

The two left in the room were silent for awhile, staring at the place where he'd disintegrated into a flock of ravens.

"Why didn't you tell him what we heard about his brother, hn?"

"I suppose I can't call that question stupid since you were preoccupied with your childish bickering throughout the whole meeting..." Sasori said, and the blonde just stared at him, not quite catching the insult. Sasori rolled his eyes and shoved him toward the door.

---

Neji watched the men leave as the last bits of daylight filtered weakly through the heavy foliage in the area. He was happy to see Hidan be the first to stalk away, bleeding from a few marks on his face and neck. Good, Neji thought, He *needed* his ass kicked. He would have liked to see it done better than that, but he could settle, seeing as he had hardly injured the man at all.

The Uchiha had poofed into a bunch of birds, which brought back an irritatingly clear memory of Hidan yelling at the crow the other day, and the other two left like normal human beings in a car. Their lights faded out of sight just as Shikamaru's car rounded the corner, to Neji's delight. He frowned, seeing the expression on his lover's face as he got closer. His heart ached as he realized just how exhausted the poor man was, and he wasn't helping matters with his constant paranoia.

He sighed and slumped away from the window. Well, he had a lot to explain, and from the looks of it, Shikamaru was in no mood to find out that Neji had put himself in danger, but he would probably find out one way or the other... he might as well go tell him. He made his way to the garage to do just that when he heard Shikamaru's voice. The man occasionally did talk to himself, and so Neji didn't think anything of it until he heard another voice talking back. His skin tingled at the sudden realization of who it was, and he tried desperately to control the seething jealous rage that threatened to overtake him. He took a deep breath and put his ear to the door.

"Not tonight Hidan. Really, I'm tired."

"Aw cmon, don't be a puss! Is this 'cuz of your little plaything in there?"

"No Hidan, it's because I'm tired."

"Uh huh. Surely it's not cause you're.." Neji heard a mock whipping sound.

That bastard, he'd still managed to reach Shikamaru first, he must have literally been waiting for him by the garage door. The asshole had purposely walked off the other direction, and circled all the way back around where Neji couldn't see him.

"Please leave."

"Not until you let me smoke you out."

"No."

"We can do it here! Princess in there can have some too, does he smoke?"

"That's none of your business and I said no!"

Neji smirked, Shikamaru was starting to get angry. He rarely got angry, and honestly Neji had only ever witnessed Shika get mad at him. And he was more than eager to witness him beat the shit out of someone with mere words.

"... Please? C'mon man... All my friends are dickheads, I just wanna chill with someone who's cool."

Neji held back a snort, as if Shikamaru Nara would change his mind at that pathetic display.

"Hidan..."

Neji's eyes widened at the heavy silence. that was a pondering silence, Shikamaru was weighing the options, and would soon shift into planning out scenarios. That meant he was actually considering it! Neji, without thinking, twisted the knob and threw open the door, clearing his throat and trying to act surprised at seeing Hidan.

"What are *you* doing here?" he asked, with real irritation.

Neji swore he saw a flash of annoyance on the Jashinists face, but it wasn't more than a flash, he just continued grinning. "Hey there

princess, we were just talking about you. Tell this guy that it's okay to relax once in awhile. He looks plain out fucking ragged huh?" Hidan jerked a thumb toward a slouching Shikamaru, Neji's chest hurt again as he looked at the man, it seemed like he was struggling just to keep his eyes open, and he looked paler than usual.

"See, your boytoy see's it too. You need to just sit down, treat yourself to a bowl, and relax. We can even do it here. We can do it here right?" He said, shooting Neji a glance that relit his anger.

He remained silent for awhile, watching his lover watch him, and his brows furrowed. The man looked like a sick puppy, and he took a deep breath. "If you want to, hon." He surrendered.

Shikamaru seemed to perk up just the slightest bit, and Neji, just for a split second felt like he'd made the right choice. Then Hidan grinned a grin that sent his heart plummeting down into his stomach.

Oh God, what had he just agreed to?

---

A/N- Bah, for anyone who even realized it, I made a mistake on the last chapter taht honestly doesn't even matter but it bugs the hell out of me. I know Shikamaru can only actually hold his jutsu for five minutes, but... just disregard that.

Lol, like I said in the entirety of things it doesn't even matter because so much else has been changed too. But, idk this is mostly just to calm my damn perfectionist self.

Anywho, here's chapter 5! Super plot heavy! :) And I tried to remember to shove some comedy all up in there too. Hope you enjoy and REVIEW!

# Chapter 6

## Bad Neighbors

---

"So he comes storming out of the house callin' me names and shit, and fucking does this wierd karate shit, " Hidan mimed Neji's fighting style as he spoke, "And you know I sure as shit wasn't expecting that. I thought maybe he'd come out and slap me or something girly like that. It actually kinda fucking hurt though, Good job by the way." He said this last toward the Hyuga, who was sitting on the couch with his face red as a tomato. He really hadn't wanted Shikamaru to hear about this from anyone else, but his lover was staring at Hidan with an amused grin.

'Thank God for weed..' Neji thought to himself.

"And you know I have a bit of a temper sometimes and this pissed me off so I got up behind him and-" Hidan paused for a second as Shikamaru's eyes narrowed. "And uh... Well That's when Kakuzu came out and broke it up.. it was funny as shit though I wish someone had recorded that. You would've laughed Pineapple head, garunteed."

Shikamaru really could imagine it, Though he had the feeling he wouldn't have laughed if he'd witnessed it. It was just the way Hidan was so jovial while he explained that made it seem funny. He really should be pissed at Neji for staring crap like that, but he just couldn't find the energy to be mad. Everything felt so good right now.

"I promise, promise, promise nothing will happen if you have some." Hidan suddenly said to Neji, offering him the pipe. "You just feel really happy. There's no hangover, you still know whats going on. I swear I ain't gonna molest you, seriously." He flashed a grin at Shikamaru at the last bit, and shook the pipe gently at Neji. "C'mon,

don't be such a priss. You're so boring y'know? You could use some relaxing too."

Neji eyeballed the pipe. One of them had to stay sober, It obviously had to be Him. Shikamaru was shouldering too much already, and neji had to help out any way he could with this maniac. And he knew damn well that he was up to something.

But... it was so hard to tell the way he was acting now. He really was just like a normal guy. He was like the jock-y, devious, best friend on some highschool movie. Always getting away with shit thorough his charms and overall pleasant aura.

He was almost fun to be around.

"C'mon..." Hidan said, giving Neji a smile, and actual smile, not a grin or a smirk, but a smile, that made his skin crawl as he realized how attractive he was when he smiled.

"Fine, just quit making that face at me, you demon." Neji snapped, gingerly taking the pipe. Hidan seemed to understand the hidden meaning behind Neji's insult, his arrogance was leaking from him in waves. Neji, ignoring it, looked questioningly at Shikamaru, who was obviously trying to hide his excitement in having his partner indulge in his favorite past-time with him.

Neji lifted the pipe to his lips and took the lighter Hidan handed to him, then pulled it away quickly. "You all can't stare at me like that! God, this isn't a porno!"

"Kinda feels like one though right?" Hidan said to Shikamaru, nudging him with his elbow.

Shikamaru just gave Neji a sleepy smile. "You're breaking your lung cherries, love."

Neji's heart fluttered at the nickname Shikamaru only ever used when he was blitzed out of his mind. He tried to fight the smile but

the corners of his mouth twitched up anyway, and he brought the pipe back to his lips, trying to pretend they weren't staring at him like a hungry dog watched at a fat kid eat pizza.

He lit the lighter and inhaled, confused for a second. Wasn't it supposed to burn or something?

"You're gonna burn it up bro! Take the lighter away!" Shikamaru said, alarmed but also in awe, as he reached for the lighter. He hadn't even taken one fourth as big a hit as that his first time.

Neji complied, still inhaling, and finally he felt the sudden searing in his lungs and pulled the pipe away, blowing out the smoke in a series of rasping coughs and hacks. Hidan had fallen to the floor from his fit of laughter and Shikamaru was trying deperatly not to join him. Seeing the Hyuga be so un-reserved was just about the funniest damn thing he'd seen in all his life.

"How can you possibly enjoy that!?" Neji rasped between coughing fits.

"It get's easier bro," Shikamaru said, grabbing a beverage and tossing it to him. "Here, drinking something helps."

"It's my lungs that hurt, not my throat." Neji huffed, catching the bottle and examining it. "And you know damn well I don't like this concentrate crap."

"Just drink it." Shikamaru said, laughter slipping into his voice.

Neji complied, taking a skeptic sip. Shikamaru and Hidan both watched, grinning wildly, as he pulled the orange juice away from his mouth and raised his brows.

"This tastes amaaazing.." He drawled, going back for more.

Hidan and Shikamaru both laughed and Hidan craned his head, "See? What'd I tell you?"

"You said it wouldn't hurt." Neji snapped after wiping his mouth and handing the bottle back to Shika.

"Uh, no, actually I didn't." Hidan piped, and the Nara next to him nodded. "It's true bro, he said nothing would happen, he said there'd be no hangover, and that you'd feel happy. Didn't say anything about being painless. " Neji sulked a bit at this, and Shikamaru gave him a warm smile. "It's okay though, its like you always say, beauty is pain."

"And this is just beautiful!" Hidan said in a dramatic voice, gesturing to Neji. "See? I'm not so bad, seriously. You gotta take my shoes on a walk sometimes, or.. whatever that saying is..."

A sudden burst of laughter made Neji jump, and then he slapped his hands over his own mouth as he realized it had come from him. Shikamaru lost it at this and Hidan just stared at him with that damn grin. Then he reached into Neji's lap, sending off alarm bells. Neji started to squirm away, but then Hidan retracted his hand with the pipe in it, and he suddenly felt silly again.

"Chill out dolly, I told'ja I ain't gonna touch a pretty little hair on your head. I don't do that shit to my buddies." Hidan's eyes held a deceiving sparkle in them that Neji wasn't sure he was actually seeing or if the marijuana was kicking in. It made him uncomfortable regardless, but Shikamaru seemed thrilled by this fact, and the two men exchanged fist bumps.

"You know.." Neji started, suddenly realizing this was his chance to make a difference without getting himself in trouble. "Since you two *are* buddies, it would be really great if you could maybe turn down your psycho meter at night.." Neji's eyes flicked back and forth between the two men, Hidan's face had lost all emotion, and it scared him. "I mean, so he can get some rest. You are just a little bit loud..." He trailed off, his chest tightening too much for him to continue. The albino said nothing for the longest time, his face a blank canvas, until Shikamaru spoke up.



"He has a point bro. You wreak havoc on my life sometimes, no offense." Hidan turned to him with the same expression, but Shikamaru seemed unfazed by it. Or if he was he hid it well. "Or like, find somewhere else to do it, y'know. " Shikaamru considered something, and added, "Then I wouldn't be so tired all the time, we could hang more."

This finally seemed to satisfy Hidan, and he smiled, "I'll see what I can do." And took a hit off the pipe.

Neji watched him incredulously, really? He would see *what he could do?* Did the man not have control over his own body? All he had to do was take his nonsense to another part of town. And hell, if they were lucky the bastard would get arrested and the problem would be solved for good.

"Want another?" Hidan interrupted, holding the pipe out for him and waving his silver eyebrows. Neji sighed and reached out to take it, surprising himself when he nearly fell off his chair. Damn, he hadn't even felt it hit him until just now. Hidan snickered but didn't retract the offer, and Neji, regaining his balance, took it and then the lighter.

---

Neji woke with a start, sitting straight up in bed with a gasp. He was surprised, for reasons he didn't understand, to find himself in his bedroom. He put his hand on his forehead and scanned the room. Shikamaru was dead to the world next to him, and Neji quickly flipped the blanket he'd kicked off back over his lover upon seeing that he was naked. Everything else was in its normal place, except for a few articles of clothing that looked like they'd been slung around the room. Eyes narrowing, Neji lifted the blanket and looked down his own body to find that he was naked too.

Well, this was awkward, but at least it was Shikamaru next to him.

He quickly slipped out of bed and fumbled around for his underwear and pants and shoved them on. And then tiptoed out the bedroom,

though he highly doubted that the loudly snoring man in his bed would wake up to anything less than an explosion or earthquake.

The house was dark, unusually dark. Usually the light of the moon and streetlights filtered in through the light fabric of their curtains. But it seemed the sky was cloudy and the streetlight on their side of the street must have burnt out. The only light offered was the very dull remnant of the lightpost across the street next to Hidan and Kakuzu's house.

He felt his way down the hall, remembering the events of last night as he came to the livingroom, or half of the events more-like. He remembered sitting and talking with Hidan and Shikamaru well into the night, and taking many, many more hits off the pipe from Hidan's seemingly endless stash. He remembered counting six before his memory went blank.

"Wonderful.." he muttered, still feeling the effects. He hadn't even bothered to check what time it was, all he could focus on at the time was that he was confused, disoriented, and *starving*. So now he pulled out his phone not only to check to time but to use as a flashlight, luckily for him it was still in his pants pocket.

"Damn this house and it's wierdly placed lightswitches.." He said aloud, almost jumping at the sound of his own voice. Then he laughed for scaring himself, and then continued to snicker because his laugh sounded so odd. Maybe he really was a tightwad if he hardley recognized his own laughter...

His phone read that it was 4:56 am. He huffed at this, telling himself to go back to bed. But his stomach argued back with an audible growl, so he adventured forth with just the small bit of light emitted from his cell phone. He was almost to the kitchen and the lightswitch as well, when he thought he heard a noise. It was something like a *swish*, like clothing rubbing against itself. He froze, his pulse suddenly racing. His eyes flicked in vain around the dark room, managing to see only silouettes in the blackness.

Why was he scared? He asked himself, trying to push the fright out of his body. There's no such thing as monsters lurking in the dark, this is real life. He smiled at this, and just as an added measure, forced himself to laugh out loud. This sounded even more awkward than his regular laugh, and got him giggling again as he started forward once more.

"Monsters in the dark..." He said uneasily, his fingertips just finding the lightswitch. "As if such a thing could ever-"

"Exist?"

Neji froze, his heart jumped up into his chest and he could hold back the small whimper that escaped him. The whisper had come from right behind him, whoever it was was practically saying it directly into his ear. He tried to will himself to turn the light on, and just as his fingers were finally about to obey he felt something wet slide from his collarbone up to his ear.

"You'd make a wonderful snack for the monsters, Neji Hyuga."

The brunette tried to pull his elbow forward so he could swing it right back and slam it into whoever was behind him, and he heard himself growl as whoever it was grabbed forcefully and spun. Neji flailed and he was released after gaining enough momentum to send him colliding with the refrigerator on the other side of the room. Before he even had time to take a breath he was grabbed by the throat and hoisted upward until his toes dangled a centimeter from the floor.

He kicked his legs out, but to no avail and he could now see the outline of the intruder. He'd dropped his phone when he fell, and wished desperately for it back as he saw the shape of their face shift slightly in a smile. And slowly, as Neji gagged and choked and fought for air, they leaned forward just enough to catch a reflection of light from the stainless steel fridge.

Violet eyes laughed at Neji as they watched the recognition fall across the brunettes face. He flailed harder with the burst of

adrenaline this gave him, but Hidan only chuckled.

"I'm not gonna hurt you, I'm just having a really hard time staying away." He said in a low voice that only made Neji kick more frantically. The fingers closed a little tighter around his throat and the edges of his vision went blurry. "Jashin-sama *will* have your soul." He growled, then bent in closer and kissed his hostage.

Neji struggled weakly for a few seconds, and when the Jashinists face finally retracted with that sick grin, the world went dark.

---

Shikamaru nearly fell out of bed at the bone chilling scream that jolted him from sleep.

"CHRIST!" He said flipping the opposite way and landing straddled on top of his partner, the emitter of the sound. "NEJI!" He yelled, shaking him violently, "Wake up!" He ordered, and when it had no effect, he drew back his hand and smacked the brunette hard enough to cause a blooming red handprint on his cheek.

This effectively silenced him, but his hand suddenly went up and directly around his throat. "Shikamaru!" He cried, throwing his arms around his lover, trying desperately to fight the tears that were welling up despite. "He was here! He was in the house! He attacked me! He tried to kill me Shika! He held me up by my throat and... and.. and he *kissed* me!"

"Neji calm down."

"NO! We have to move away Shikamaru, I don't fucking care about this house, I don't." he repeated, as if trying to convince himself more than Nara. "I just don't want anything more to do with that psycho, I don't want to see him, I don't want to be around him, I don't want to hear his voice, I don't even want to be in the same city as him!"

"Neji stop." The sudden authority in Shikamaru's voice caught him off guard, and he listened. "It's four thirty in the morning, we just went to

bed an hour ago. Hidan went home, you just had another nightmare."

Neji stared up at him, and then remembering what had happened, looked down Shikamaru's body, then his own. They were both fully clothed, as if they'd stumbled into the room and fell into bed and passed out. Then he caught what his lover had said. His head wreched sideways to look at his alarm clock.

4:30 am.

That couldn't be right... No, it had been almost five...

"Neji.." Shikamaru said softly, and Neji looked at his face, his heart aching again with what he saw. Shikamaru's eyes were hung so heavy, and the bags underneath had only gotten darker. It almost seemed like his entire face was sagging. "It was just a dream, okay? Let's go back to sleep, he actually kept his word, he's being quiet." The dark haired man slowly climbed off Neji and back over to his side of the bed.

Neji just sat there, different waves of emotions all fighting for dominance. His eyes threatened to leak once again.

It had felt so real though, even his neck was sore..

He turned to look at Shika again, opening his mouth to keep argueing, but closing it again as he saw the man had already fallen back asleep. He sighed and laid back down, snuggling up to his lover and telling himself over and over that it wasn't real.

He closed his eyes, but didn't fall asleep until just before Shikamaru's alarm went off.

---

A/N- HOLY TITS! Two chapters in one day? You better beleive it.

This one, I'm so proud of this one. Gave you plenty of comedy, and then scared the shit right outta you, and then probably pissed you off a little too. xD

Hope you enjoyed!

REVIEW!

## Chapter 7

A/N- Helloo, sorry it took so long to get this up. I'm not going to make excuses because you probably couldn't care less, but basically a lot of crap has been happening that just obliterated any motivation I had whatsoever to be the slightest bit productive.

Anyway, here's Chapter 7.

---

### Bad Neighbors

"It's fine Shikamaru, it's going to be a slow day anyway, you have a million vay-cay and Sick days saved up, why don't you use one of 'em."

"But sir I'm not sick, that would be like playing Hookey, I couldn't relax if-"

"Shikamaru!"

The commanding tone made Shikamaru swallow heavily. This was bizarre, he had gotten up when his alarm went off, gone through his normals schedule; Shower, get dressed, hair, breakfast, and go to work. All of the clocks at home had assured him that he wasn't late, and yet here Asuma was telling him he was two hours. Why hadn't anyone from the office called him? What was happening?

"Listen. You look terrible."

Shikamaru flinched away as if were more of an insult than an observation.

"You look terrible and I know you probably feel worse than you look, you've been acting like a zombie around the office, and not only are you no good to us like this, but I'm worried about you." Asuma's brows furrowed at the last, and Shikamaru watched him silently,

unsure of what to say as he pulled the cigarette out of his mouth and flicked it onto the carpet. The secretary at the front desk cleared her throat in protest, And Asuma held up a hand to silence her.

"But Sir, you don't understand, I need to research, I need peace and quiet to do that, my new neighbor..."

"I'm aware of your new neighbor that's been keeping you up night after night, you've informed me. "

"No, that' s not-"

"Shikamaru Nara, If I have to I will give you an official order. *Go home, get some rest.* If I let you come in here now you're going to get docked for being late and it's going to be recorded. Being the perfectinist you are, I can't have that hovering over you for the next three years. So I'm just going to put it down as vacation, you're not faking sick, you're just taking some well-deserved time off. Now get out of here."

He had already turned to walk away, waving away Shikamaru's choked out protests.

"Go home!" He yelled again over his shoulder, nodding to the security guard.

Shikamaru's heart did a somersault, he would resort to literally kicking him out if he tried to stay, how rediculous. Was he really that much harm? The security guard nodded to him, as if reading his mind, eyes hard and arms crossed across his chest.

And suddenly the Nara was angry. He whirled around and stormed out, stomping to his car and slamming the door. This was Hidan's fault, he knew it damn well. And it wasn't even about missing work, he could get over that. It was the fact that he was *not* a stupid man, and Hidan seemed to think he could pull one over on him. Everything had already clicked into place, he knew what was going on, Neji's 'nightmare and then the clocks being late almost 2 hours, not just



one clock, but every clock in the damn house. And if he wasn't so fucking tired, he would have realized that the sun was up far too early and far too high for it to be six a.m, not to mention getting him stoned out of his mind the night before.

Before he knew it he was already home, and there was none other than the Jashinist himself out in his yard sprawled out on the dirt staring at the sky. He looked up as Shikamaru drove past, seeming to struggle a bit as he reached one hand up and waved weakly before plopping back down into the dust. He hadn't even looked and he'd known who it was, he'd memorized the sound of his car in just the few weeks he'd been here. This, for reason's Shikamaru couldn't really even understand, just made him angrier.

He pulled into the driveway in a hurry and slammed the car into park before it had even completely stopped moving, and it made a loud grinding sound in protest. It didn't register though, he couldn't care less, he just wanted to get inside, sneak past Neji and go back to bed while the Maniac was still being quiet. Those were Asuma's orders.

Of course it wasn't that easy, it was never that easy.

"You're home early." Neji stated as he opened the garage door just before Shikamaru reached the handle. "And pissed.." he added, making a face.

"I don't wanna talk about it."

"But you just left, what did they just run out of paper for you to push?"

"I was two hours late Neji." Shikamaru sighed, trying desperately to control his emotions.

"What? That doesn't even..." His eyes seemed to shift in the understanding, and Shikamaru nodded upon seeing it. Neji was silent, and stepped aside to let his lover in, his face seemed to have

adopted a slight shade of green, and after he closed the door behind Shika, his hand went to his throat.

His understanding quickly flipped into more confusion, and he took off after Shikamaru. He wanted to clarify, and to ask what the hell he was going to do, but he really didn't know how to start. And with the mood the spikey haired man was in, he didn't know if he even wanted to engage in any sort of conversation.

"They gave me vacation leave for today." Shikamaru explained as he reached the bedroom, he was already tearing his shirt off. "I'm going back to bed. I don't think Asuma's going to let me come back until I don't look like a 'zombie' anymore." He did the mock quotation sign as he said zombie, with two fingers on each hand twitching to the syllables. "As long as the shithead keeps his promise and stays quiet, you can probably expect me to be dead to the earth for most of the day..."

Neji just nodded, still confused and just barely registering this information. Usually he and Shikamaru were on the same page, but this book was a toughie. Why wasn't he over there kicking that stupid albino sack of shit's ass? He had been harrassing them, being a public nuisance, noise pollution, and not to mention assault. He swallowed, feeling the throb as his adams apple brushed against the now yellowing spot on his neck. He could beat the shit out of him, call the police, and have him thrown in fucking Alkatraz for all he cared. Wait.. was that a real thing? He couldn't remember, that didn't matter anyway.

"Shikamaru.." He said softly, and his lover turned to him with an indescribably tired look on his face, his eyes pleading for him not to ask questions. He tried to choke down the knot in his throat, he really should be as angry as he was, but instead Neji just felt a deep seated depression. He cleared his throat and leaned forward, grabbing the tired mans face and giving him a deep, lasting kiss and released him. He seemed to barely recognize it though.

"Sleep well, I'll try to make the silence last. Even if I have to... have a conversation with him or something. I'll hold my temper, maybe I can get him to go with me to the park or something..."

Shikamaru raised a brow as he spoke, telling him without speaking that he was making promises he wouldn't keep, but nodded none-the-less and finished stripping. He folded the blankets back, and Neji watched him until he was settled into the sheets, and still watched until his lover released the tell-tale sigh that meant he was turning off his mind and trying to relax. Neji smiled, and left, shutting the door gently behind him.

---

The sun had long set when Neji heard the bedroom door squeaking open. He shifted a bit, and then his eyes flashed open. He sat up abruptly, wiping the drool off his chin and looked at the clock. It said just past 1 a.m. No... that meant it was around three. He'd forgotten to reset them because he sat down with a tub of ice cream and...

"Oh dammit..." He said, looking at the floor, there was a large puddle of melted ice cream leaking slowly at pace even a slug would call slow up toward the television.

He'd fallen asleep, he realized as he got up to grab a towel. The sound of the toilet flushing reminded him of what had woken him up, Shikamaru must be up now, and with a start he looked back at the clock.

Damn! Shikamaru had slept for 14 hours!

"Shika? Are you alive again?" He called out, trying to work the teasing intent into his still sleepy voice as he went for the mop. A grunt in reply was all he heard, and Neji sighed. Hopefully he wouldn't be in one of those bad moods from the sleep still lingering. Though it was a high probability. It didn't matter, he'd let him work it out himself, they'd both got some much-needed rest, maybe if he was 'persuasive' enough Neji could get Shikamaru in the mood for-

An unnecessarily loud pounding on the door made him jump and release a squeal that made him wince despite being the one who made it. "Oh for the love of- you can't be serious..." He threw the mop down and stomped over to the door, Shikamaru was peeking out of the bathroom with a toothbrush in his mouth, Neji ignored his questioning eyes, knowing it wasn't so much as a 'who's at the door?' but a 'You know who that is, and you're still going to answer it?' kind of question.

He opened the door with his sass at full volume. And the albino at the door, for some stupid reason was facing the opposite way, his attention captured by some inane object that would have the same effect on a toddler, or a really dumb cat.

Neji cleared his throat and cocked his hip, brows high in poorly hidden disinterest, and Hidan turned around making a face that claimed Neji had just shown up unexpectedly. "Good afternoon Hidan, I'm assuming you're not sober."

"I'll assume that you're a cross-dressing hooker if it'll get you in my pants."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

A look of confusion flashed only briefly across Hidan's face before he shrugged it away. "Iunno, hey where's pineapple hair? I thought I seen him come home early but I couldn't fuckin remember if that was really happening..."

Neji considered this, and shifted to better block the Jashinist from seeing into the house. "Well, it wasn't. He's still at work." he forced himself to glare into those fucking violet eyes. and he shuddered as he realized that in a strange way he almost liked looking at them. He told himself he didn't, he told himself they were evil just like the person they belonged to, and he tried to conjure up the image of being held up by the throat in the darkness, with those stupid fucking eyes the only thing defined enough to focus on. And his gut churned at the thought that even then he'd been fascinated by them, just in

that fleeting second before he'd realized whose they were. "So go the hell away." He stepped back to close the door and his heart leaped to his throat when Hidan slammed a foot in the way to stop it. A bare foot, mind you.

"Hey now princess, I thought we were past this bullshit. We're friends remember? Im a nice guy. Lemme in, I'll wait for him, you and me can hang."

"As lovely as that sounds, Hidan, I think I'll pass." Neji tried in vain to again shut the door, but Hidan caught it with his hand and opened it, seemingly with ease, Neji unhappily noted.

"Why don't you like me? I'm tryin' really fucking hard here, give me a fucking break."

"Maybe because I'm not a fucking moron! Quit *harrasing* us, quit talking to us, quit being near us, just leave us alone. We want nothing more to do with you. We don't want to be your friend, or your acquaintance, or even your fucking neighbor, why don't you just pack up your shit and just fucking LEAVE!"

the lingering silence stretched on forever, and neji was trying oh-so-desperately to keep himself from crying. he was tired of these mind games, he didn't even care if admitting that Hidan was playing mind games meant that he actually had a brain. He would admit it a thousand times over if it would get the albino to leave them alone.

His eyes widened only the slightest bit as he realized two things. Hidan was pissed. And Shikamaru, who had thankfully remained hidden, had just heard all of that and not intervened. This, he thought, meant that he thought it best not to show himself lest Hidan become even more angry at the notion that he had been lied to. This also meant that Shikamaru didn't think that Hidan would lose it and attack him. And honestly the Hyuuga didn't know if that would even be a bad thing, he almost wished shikamaru *wasn't* here. The man had assaulted him in the middle of the night and played it out as a nightmare, he wasn't really sure how, because there were a few

things that just didn't add up, but the clocks being set back was just too much of a damn coincidence.

He let his Byakugan kick in, mainly only to add to his threatening meter, but the man at the door didn't even flinch. Neji saw the workings of the mans body, his chakra patterns were slightly off than most peoples, he thought, maybe it looked like it was struggling a bit, if inanimate energy could do that... He didn't know how to explain it really. he couldn't remember if it had always been like that and he just never noticed, or if it was maybe diferent now because the man was trying to keep his temper.

Hidan finally removed his hand from the door muttering in a voice so low that Neji himself almost didn't hear it. "You better watch your fucking back princess. Everything could have been a whole lot easier if you'd done it my way..."

"Go fuck yourself." Neji spat.

Hidan turned away, smirking. "I warned you not to piss me off..." With that he walked away, his hands in his pockets. Neji watched him go up until the man yanked open his own front door and disappeared inside.

"What the hell was that about?" Shikamaru said, coming down the hall and wiping his clean-shaven face with a towel.

"The psycho wanted to 'hang out' again. I told him to shove it."

"Uh, yeah, I know. I heard everything. What I meant was why all the sudden? Especially after being so buddy-buddy last night."

"LAST NIGHT IS EXACTLY WHY! You and I both know what's going on here Shika, you know that time I thought he was watching me sleep? I bet that actually happened too. He's fucking tormenting us, he's getting off on it. Look at what he's doing to you! You're so tired you can't think straight, I be he did that shit on purpose! Obviously

he has *some* sort of control over himself, seeing as he didn't fucking try to kill me. He looked like he was going to try to kill me."

Shikamaru stared at him, his expression back to the controlled boredom that Neji hadn't realized he'd missed. "You really need to stop swearing. It doesn't suit you."

Neji felt his face curl in a smile, as irritated as he was. "Don't do that to me. Just agree with me, tell me I'm right and justified in not wanting him near us."

"You *are* justified."

"Thank you."

"But I'm telling you now, I'm going to tell him you're sorry."

"WHAT?! why?"

"I can't tell you why, but I have a plan. Just trust me, I'm not going to let him hurt you again."

"How can you tell me to trust you when you don't trust me enough to tell me what's going on in that damn brain of yours."

"Because, love," Shikamaru leaned forward and pecked him on the forehead. "You're a terrible actor. I need you to play along. The man is smarter than he's been letting us think, and he'll catch on if your reactions to what I do aren't honest."

"Then why are you telling me this at all?"

"Because, as much as I plan, you're unpredictable, and I don't want you to leave me over it. Then I'd have to go track you down and win you back, it's all just more trouble than it's worth."

"Tch, would be kind of romantic though."

"Hey, I already went through that hell once. I have you and I'm not dumb enough to put myself through it again. Just trust me."

Neji scowled and stepped away from his lover. "Whatever. I'm going to go get some dinner, seeing as you're back to you're old self for the moment. I want to milk it."

Shikamaru made a sound of understanding as Neji made his way to the garage. "I'm taking your car." he yelled back, and didn't bother to make sure the Nara heard. If God loved him at all, he would make sure Hidan wasn't watching as he drove away. If Shikamaru was thinking of the man as smart enough to be a threat, Neji better damn well start paying attention.

---

Neji had only left for a total of 10 minutes when the door was once again being beat. Shikamaru poked his head back out of the bathroom again, fiddling with his ponytail, and stared at the door. Hidan couldn't really be back already...

The sound came again and he sighed. Maybe the man really was a idiot after all...

"Open up you pineapple headed fuck, I know you're home."

"What do you want Hidan?" Shikamaru yelled out, surprised the albino didn't just barge in. Neji must've locked the door...

"Lemme in and I'll fucking tell you!"

"Is it important? I'm in the middle of something."

"You're damn right it's fucking important."

"I' m not smoking with you tonight. "

Silence. He should have known that's what it was, "You have a problem Hidan, go to rehab."



"Rehab is for quitters." Shikamaru yelled and spun at the sudden voice.

"How the fu-"

"He forgot to close the garage. Anyway I don't wanna fucking smoke, I just wanna hang out, I waited all night and day and let you sleep like you said. Now I'm bored. Where'd the princess go anyway? Did you hear that little priss? Yellin at me? Damn, who lit the fuse on his tampon..."

"Uh, he went to get stuff to make us a dinner..."

"Oh thank Jashin I'm fucking starved, what are we having?"

"Hidan, We're going to take a night to spend with each other. We haven't had one in awhile."

"Neither have I."

"You just spent most of the night with us yesterday."

"Well yea but that doesn't count, your pansies were out of your fucking heads. Seriously."

"Hidan.."

"O-fuckin-kay, jeez, you don't need to get all fatherly on me... Can I at least chill until he comes back? I'll make sure he don't see me, you won't get in trouble. Cross my heart." Hidan did the action that goes with this saying and then stuck his lip out.

"Ugh, fine whatever. Just don't piss him off any more today. I'm the one who has to clean up your handiwork."

"Damn you sound like Kakuzu." The jashinist said, running his hand through his silver hair. "I won't, I won't. He won't even know I was here." He had meandered his way around the room and was looking at the knickknacks on the mantle in the livingroom. Shikamaru leaned

against the counter and watched him. Now that he actually was sober, Hidan was calm, and he didn't have Neji whining in his ear, he had the chance to do some analyzing. The albino actually moved with quite a bit of grace, his pale fingers picked up the fragile objects and moved them around with the curiosity of a child, but with a liquid motion and careful precision that seemed unnatural on him.

"Hidan."

The man continued observing a small porcelain Eiffle tower.

"Hidan."

"What."

Shikamaru hesitated, staring at him with narrowed eyes. And finally his neighbor looked up at him, some emotion on his face that told him he recognized Shikamaru's tone, and what kind of conversation it was going to lead to, and obviously wasn't looking forward to it.

"Why do you pretend to be an idiot."

His face quickly flashed to a questioning confusion. Obviously that hadn't been what he'd expected Shikamaru to say. He put the breakable back on the mantle and turned to where his body was fully facing his spikey haired neighbor.

"What?"

"Why do you pretend to be an idiot?" Hidan just continued staring at him, so he went on. "I know that you're not. You want people to think you are, I'm not sure why. But you also get mad at them for thinking so. So why do you do it?"

"How do you figure that?"

"I'm not so stupid either, Hidan."

The man almost looked uncomfortable, and Shikamaru watched the emotions flash across his face as he thought about the answer. He realized for a moment that he hadn't thought anyone would ever see through it, and didn't have a proper defence lined up. He also thought he might see some appreciation buried in here somewhere that someone, *anyone*, had noticed and cared enough to inquire.

"Well you should know that already. Mister, I'm so much fucking smarter than everyone else, but it sucks cos' I'm fucking miserable because everyone puts all the responsibility of everything on me."

It was Shikamaru's turn to be surprised.

"Don't feel all fucking high and mighty. Don't give me some stupid-ass speech about 'being responsible' and all that bullshit. You know more than anyone else that the burdens that come with that shit make you die and early death. You're probably still sitting there thinking I'm dumber than you, but you're jealous too. People don't expect shit from me do they?"

"But how is having everyone thinking you're a complete nutcase help anything?"

"I AM a nutcase! So what? I fucking enjoy pain, I like it, I like annoying other people. It's good entertainment. I said I wasn't stupid, not that I wasn't fucked up."

Shikamaru considered this, but it still didn't make sense. Hidan's voice was rising, but his demeanor said he was still calm. The man was just unpredictable.

"I've heard this crap too many times before. Don't feel some 'special connection' with me just because you know that I pretend to be a little dumber than I am sometimes. You're just like every other dumb fucker out there that wants me to act according to their beliefs and morals. To be what *they* think is right. You wanna lecture me, cool, go for it. But shit isn't going to change."

There was a silence that dragged uncomfortably on as the two stared at each other. Shikamaru still couldn't really read Hidan, maybe it was easier when he being a moron. This was obviously a touchy subject, one that was a little too emotional and confusing for his liking. He shouldn't have brought it up. He didn't think Hidan would actually have a good excuse for it. He was assuming maybe the man would deny it and continue on instead of answering so bluntly.

"So..." Shikamaru said, and Hidan started winding his way around the room again, looking at pictures on the walls now. "What's your devotion level."

He could swear he saw Hidan tense up before he quickly turned around. "My what?"

"Your devotion level. To Jashin. What's your rank?"

Hidan raised an eyebrow at him. "The fuck are you talking about?"

"C'mon. I looked a little into it, I'm just curious."

Hidan made a face that reflected an emotion Shikamaru couldn't quite recognize before breaking out into a huge grin. He strode over to the opposite side of the counter, never breaking eye contact, and mimicked Shikamaru's stance, leaning in until their faces were inches apart. Shikamaru fought the urge to back away.

"You're curious?" Hidan purred.

"Uh... yeah." Shikamaru glanced down at Hidan's mouth, he wasn't really sure why. But the glint of teeth made him nervous.

"You want to know more about the great and almighty Jashin?"

"Yes." Shikamaru repeated, thinking he knew what was coming. His mind flashed between one thought and another. This was a very

uncomfortable situation. Hidan thought he wanted to be a Jashinist, he was going to ask him if he wanted to be in his cult.

"I can show you the ways of Jashin. If you want."

"I-I think you're misunderstanding me."

"No. I get it. I'm smarter than you think, remember. But the only way for you to learn more is by joining us."

"Us?"

"Uh, Yeah. You really think I just made up some fucking God to follow and worship randomly? You just said you looked a little into it, you should know it's a real thing, so yeah, us."

"I'm an athiest. Unless you can prove to me that an omnipotent being is real with cold, hard, tangible, evidence then I'm not interested in any religion. Even yours."

"That's too bad. You'd be a wonderful addition."

Shikamaru saw the sheen of the blade just before he swooped backward. It narrowly missed his jugular, and Hidan howled as he vaulted over the island, swinging again. Shikamaru ducked down and dove outward, barely avoiding having his throat stomped on. he somersaulted into the living room and stood up and whirled around, but he was taken offguard by Hidan's speed, the man was already on him, his normal amused grin turned into a maniacal sneer.

"HIDAN!" he cried, flipping backward only to lose his balance as he hit the couch, he fell sideways over the cushions and rolled off just before the pike Hidan was swinging made contact with the fabric, leaving a nasty rip. Shikamaru winced, Neji was going to flip shit.

There were more important matters at hand, Hidan was attacking him. Why? Because he'd refused to join? Oh shit.. Those who

refused to join were killed, he'd forgotten. how could he have forgotten! Damn it all!

He rolled again as Hidan's hand shot out to grab him, and he lurched forward underneath the albino's legs and straightened himself, managing to catch the side of his attackers head with his elbow as he turned to face him.

"You MOTHERFUCKER!" Hidan growled, still smiling, and he went to grab him again, simultaneously swinging his weapon. Shikamaru jumped backward, hit the wall, and let his feet drop out from under him as hidan's fist connected with the drywall where his head would have been and went through it in a sickening crack. Shikamaru's stomach dropped, how the hell was he going to explain this to Neji...

He swung his leg toward Hidans right ankle and heard himself yelp as it connected and Hidan's weight crashed down onto him. He managed to push him off and avoid another swipe of the pike, then stumbled to his feet and ran for the door. He had to get him out of the house, it was the late afternoon, the shadows would be long, and his jutsu would be at his best... but only as long as he could make it out.

Then suddenly his face hit the floor and he was seeing stars, his arm was pulled up and behind him and his other arm was pinned by a knee.

"You idiot you don't ever turn your fucking back on your opponent." Hidan said, then laughed as Shikamaru struggled frantically.

"Fuckin' calm down! For fuck's sake I'm not going to hurt you."

"GET THE HELL OFF ME!"

"Not until you promise you aren't gonna get up and try to stab me or some shit."

"YOU FUCKING ATTACKED ME YOU PSYCHO!"

Hidan laughed again, not a chuckle or a snicker, but a full on laugh. Shikaamru shuddered at it. "I was testing you man. Chill the fuck out. I wouldn't have hurt you. Well, maybe I would have, but I would have made up for it. Sorry for scaring you, did you shit yourself or what?"

Shikaamru listened to his labored breathing, how much did the zealot weigh anyway? "Testing me?" He said, trying to force himself to calm down.

"Yea dude, I was just fucking around. I'm sorry.. Protocol and shit."

"Protocol?"

Hidan's weight left him and he pulled his arm back into a normal position, slumping. He could practically hear him grinning while he talked. "Yeah. It's a shame you're not religious, you'd be a bamf Jashinist buddy."

Shikamaru sat up, absolutly bewildered. "You.." He looked around the room, it wasn't trashed, but something had obviously gone down. Neji was going to lose his mind. "You tore my fucking couch, and put a hole in my wall."

Hidan ran his hand through his hair. "Yeah, I broke my promise huh..."

Shikamaru jumpe dto his feet and stomped up to him. "You fucking idiot I'm not going to hear the end of this! If you want me to be your friend you need to stop making my life so God damn difficult."

Hidan stared at him, he was only a few inches taller, but at the moment it seemed like a lot more. A silver brow raised, "God?"

Shikamaru clenched his fists, trying to keep himself from punching the fuck out of the man. How could he act liek this after what he'd just done, fucking idiot, fucking psycho-He immediatly relaxed. Damn, this must be how Neji felt...

He sighed. "It's just a figure of speech. Don't look too much into it. You're fixing this though." Hidan opened his mouth to say something, but Shika quickly cut him off. "Yes, you are. Don't think I won't go over there and tell Kakuzu what you did. I'm sure he'd have no problem ripping you to pieces after you made him spend precious money to fix our house."

Hidan just grinned to cover the glimmer of fear in his eyes. "Ohh, you play dirty pineapple head. I like it." he took a step back and went to examine the wall. "Yeah, I'll fix it for you. No prob. For now just throw a blanket over the couch and put a picture or something over this."

"We don't have a frame big enough to hide that. And he'll notice anyway."

"Well then what do you fucking suggest?"

Shikamaru thought on this, He could tell Hidan to leave and make up some story about how he'd kicked Hidan's ass after he tried to come over. But that wasn't liable to work. Really the best thing to do would be to be honest. Neji already knew Shikamaru was up to something, surely he would understand after yelling his head off.

"Stay until he gets back and tell him you did it." The Nara shrugged.

Hidan opened his mouth to argue, and then decided better of it. He shrugged as well, and plopped onto the couch. "Fine, I ain't afraid of your little boy-toy, like you."

He let this go, and flopped down on the chair across from him. Hidan was smiling, and he tried to ignore it.

"Still think I'm smart?"

"Shut up."

Hidan snickered and a car door slammed. The two men's eyes met, Hidan's laughing and Shikamaru's tired and accusing.



---

"You're a real piece of work, Shikamaru Nara." Neji sighed. "Just get it fixed, and I'll get started. Is he staying?"

"May I, master?" Hidan chirped from the couch.

"Whatever.." Neji said, not meeting Shikamaru's eyes. He continued pulling things out of the plastic grocery bags, and when he was finished with that he pulled out a few pots and pans. Shikamaru watched him, feeling like Neji's understanding was only because Hidan was here, and would probably turn into something worse later.

"You are *too* kind, princess." Hidan said, and Shikamaru shot him a look. "I mean mr. Hyuuga." He added, ignoring the continued glare. Shikamaru huffed, why could the man ever just shut up?

"I heard some rumors I thought maybe you'd be interested in." Neji said from the stove. And Shikamaru was startled with the complete lack of anger or depression in his voice. "It might pertain to the murders. The cashier and that wierd girl who lives over on 5th were talking." he continued, and Shikamaru pulled out a bar stool to sit on. Hida was being blessedly silent, after turning on the t.v. and changing to some channel where a man in a mask was relentlessly stabbing a screaming woman. They both needed to go back to acting school.

"They said something about a local gang. Called the Akatsuki? Do you know of them?"

Shikamaru nodded, then realized Neji wasn't looking, so he replied, "Yea. They've come across my desk a couple times. They've been harmless so far, but they tend to be present at a lot of crimes."

"Are they actually involved?" Hidan interrupted, making Neji jump and whirl around to glare at him. He'd snuck up behind Shikamaru, and was now looking at him with an amount of intrest Neji didn't know he could possess. He reminded himself of what Shikamaru had said.

"I don't recall they were. Just present at the time the police arrived. There were a few when one of the known members actually involved themselves, but according to testimony they were trying to stop the crime, not aid it."

Hidan seemed satisfied at this and returned to the couch. Shikamaru watched him go, his mind racing.

"Well anyway they were talking about some of the people in the gang and I guess someone said Itachi Uchiha was the leader. " Hidan tensed at this, and Shikamaru smiled, just now understanding why Neji hadn't been furious that Hidan was here.

"Itachi, Hidan do you know anything about this? That guy's your friend isn't he?"

"We hang out." he replied blankly. "I wouldn't consider him a friend though. He mostly just shows up when he wants shit."

"So, is it true that he's in the Akatsuki?" Neji prodded further.

"Iunno. Never heard him mention it." He started flipping through the channels.

Shikamaru let the silence drag on for a bit, thinking of how to pursue this further without Hidan attempting another trick like he'd done earlier.

"I thought he was supposed to be in prison for life." Neji interjected for him.

"Got out on good behaviour." Hidan replied, his voice lower than normal.

"It's stupid that they let people like that out. The man is a monster. He's just going to do it again."

Hidan remained silent, and Shikamaru suddenly thought that this conversation would be better pursued with someone who could

actually restrain Hidan present. Shikamaru could do it, but it took a hell of a lot, and If Hidan was pissed enough he could fight for hours.

"He did his time. Learned his lesson." The jashinist finally said.

"I don't think so. If you're screwed up in the head enough to kill someone you're going to do it again. And he killed his family, people who loved him. That's messed up.."

"Neji.." Shikamaru warned.

"And if he's leading a gang of other people.. This town has a serious problem on its hands. Why has nothing been done about this yet?"

"He hasn't done anything illegal." Shikamaru said quickly.

"He killed 6 people!"

"Shut the fuck up!" Hidan barked, making the pair both jump. He was up off the couch and at the island in a split second. "You have no idea what kind of people they were and what kind of shit they were involved in. Itachi was defending himself and protecting his little brother. he did what he had to do and shouldered the burden and you have *no fucking right* to judge him when you don't even fucking know what happened. So shut your prissy little fucking mouth before I shut it for you forever."

"Well still he-"

"I said shut up! You morons talking about shit that you have no right to be talking about it the reason the Akatsuki had to be started in the first fucking place. "

He whirled around, his anger radiating from him so thick Shikamaru could almost see it. "You sit there and make your judgements and fucking accusations, princess. See what it brings you, you think you're so much better than me, than my friends, than everyone, you

don't know shit. I don't care, you just stepped on my last fucking nerve. Enjoy your dinner."

The slamming door shook the walls and shook some drywall dust out of the hole Hidan had 'installed'. The two just stared at each other, Neji's eyes were wide with a mix of emotions, and finally it settled on anger.

"You deal with this shit. I'm washing my hands of it." He turned around and dumped something into the now boiling water, and Shikamaru put his head in his hands, trying to hide his smile.

---

A/N- BAHH! I tried to make this super long for you guys, since I haven't posted in awhile. It took a buttload of effort. I don't actually know if it's longer, but I have to go to work, and I figured you guys have waited long enough.

Shit is gonna start hitting the fan from now on, in case you couldn't guess. :) See ya next time.

Review!

And I want serious reviews. Not "good job! keep posting!" This isn't facebook, I don't want a comment. I want a review. Tell me what you liked, what you didn't, stuff like that. Please, it helps me improve.

## Chapter 8

### Bad Neighbors

---

"I need help."

Asuma looked up from his paperwork, a cigarette hanging from his lips, as usual. Shikamaru had come bursting in and slammed a paper down, saying he'd needed help. Shikamaru swallowed hard, and continued on.

"I need information, I can't seem to find it myself. I think I know who did it, but I'm not completely convinced yet. I don't have solid proof, and getting it is going to be risky."

Asuma continued staring blankly at him.

"I need something to call for immediate assistance when I need it. A button or something that will have backup wherever I am in minutes. It has to be that fast, any longer and I might be dead."

"Uhh, Unless they're following you I can't guarantee it. Where might you be?" Asuma finally said, overlooking all the obvious questions that would make more sense to ask.

"I have no idea yet."

"Well, I can get you the button and information, at the least." he mumbled, reaching for the paper Shikamaru had given him. His eyes grew wider for a split second before returning to the usual half-lidded nature as he read over it, and he looked over the top to the Nara's stern expression. "You're serious? This hasn't been passed to us yet, I thought you were talking about the guy who's been blowing up dumpsters around town.."

Shikamaru sullenly shook his head.

"Is this some sort of revenge scheme for your neighbor?"

"No. It has nothing to do with that. These coincidences are just too much to look over though."

"You realize you're basing your entire thought process on rumors and the word of someone who's been pronounced legally insane?"

"Have a little more faith in me sir, I know what's going on."

Asuma leaned back in his chair, looking Shikamaru up and down with squinted eyes. He reached up to scratch behind his ear and then sighed in defeat. Shikamaru saw this and smiled. The two didn't say anymore, but a casual nod was exchanged before the Nara turned and left.

---

"What do you mean, 'might have given us away'?" The redhead, Sasori, was glaring at Hidan, who was shifting nervously.

"Well I don't really think I did, I mean, they've seen you guys over here before, they know that I know you. What was fucking supposed to say?"

"You were supposed to say casual, untraceable responses like we *practiced*, you dumbass."

"That's what I did!" Hidan snarled to the blond. "But the stupid little bitch kept fucking ragging on you," He met Itachi's sharingan, ignoring the risk and not hiding his guilt. "All I really said was they had no right to pass their judgements on you.."

"And what else?" The Uchiha asked calmly.

"Well, I said that idiots that went around starting shit like that was why the Akatsuki was founded in the first place..."

An entire room of eyes stared at him.

"But that's all I said!" He pleaded, "I mean seriously, he's cool he's not going to go blabbing. We have a respect for each other.."

"Is this a fact?" The Uchiha said, sharingan still burning away.

"Well, I mean he didn't outright say he'd keep his mouth shut but, I don't know. He's not a bad guy, he won't do that to me..."

"How do you know?" Came Kakuzu's low voice from the corner of the room. Hidan just scowled at him. "Hidan... I told you to watch yourself around him. Being careless like that is why we can't seem to stay in one place."

"Well dammit Kakuzu! You all fucking know how I get when I'm pissed, stuff just fucking comes out."

"That's not what I meant." Kakuzu muttered, leaving the room.

"Regardless, it's really not that bad is it?" Another man stated, blue skin and dark blue hair dominated his appearance, and he sat with his arms crossed, looking quizzically at Itachi. "What we're doing isn't bad. They can't find any grounds to do anything to us, nothing is illegal."

"No, they can't. But if the media gets ahold of our name, all the jutsu users are going to come looking for us. And whether they want to join or kill us doesn't matter, having that kind of publicity will make our jobs even more difficult." Itachi closed his eyes as he spoke, as if trying to calm himself. Hidan visibly relaxed as the absence of Sharingan trained on him.

"The point that I'm trying to fucking make here is that he's not going to do shit. And if he does, I'll fucking take care of it."

"Hidan, I've warned you what will happen if you threaten people."

"Oh shut it! Damn, I'm not that fucking stupid, all I have to do is go back to not letting them sleep, they'll be so desperate they'll agree to

anything."

Sasori sighed, and waved at him. "Just sit down, we have more important things to attend to. Someone is still killing, a body was found within the county last night. Luckily the police didn't get ahold of the information and send it to the media. Someone reported it straight to us, anonymous."

"Did you go to investigate?" Itachi said, looking to a shadow in the corner. A pair of yellow eyes popped into existence and considered the question for a moment, and the silhouette shifted in a nod.

"And it was the same as the others?"

Again the figure nodded. And Itachi turned back to the rest of the party. "This has become priority. We need to stop this. They're so close now that the local police will be getting involved, and we are all going to be suspects. It's going to be hard to work in secrecy when we're being constantly watched and followed."

"And worse than that, " Deidara interjected, eyes wide in unmasked fear. "Whoever it is will target us. They favor powerful jutsu users, and that's what this organization is made up entirely of."

"Oh shut it blondie they wouldn't dare fuck with us."

"And how do you know him?"

Hidan glared at him, "Because, I'll fucking kill'em."

There was a long silence that stretched on as the Jashinist met every pair of eyes in the room with his glare. Only Deidara averted his gaze and fidgeted as he waited for the religious man to be dismissed.

"I'll be visiting you all regularly for reports, I don't want any shirking on this, if you have a chance take it." He fixed his eyes on Hidan, mangekyo symbols forming in crimson against the white of his eyes.



Hidan swallowed audibly, but didn't break it. "But use your head. If I hear about any more sabotage, intentional or not, this problem is going to be taken care of for good."

Hidan didn't fight the look of hurt that swept in the thinnest of hazes over him, but also didn't argue. He watched Itachi poof away in dismissal and the rest of the party followed suit. It wasn't until they were all long gone that he let out a sigh and ran his hand through his hair.

"What are you going to do?"

Hidan turned to the deep voice, his fatigue starting to show itself oh-so-faintly under his eyes. He stared at the masked man, silently asking for an explanation to his question. But all he received was a raised eyebrow, hidden but for the shift in his multicolored eyes.

"You don't know what you're doing anymore. You're going to screw up again, and I'm going to have to clean up your mess. I'll be damned if I'm wasting any more money on relocation."

Hidan seemed to consider this, turning so that the rest of his body faced his partner as well. "Shut up old man.. I'm fucking trying, can't you just give me a break?"

"You have to stop letting your toys get under your skin. Stop thinking of them as friends, they're not. They don't understand you, they don't care about you, they just want to see you dead and buried. You keep bringing emotion into this, you're going to end up killing yourself just to escape the web you're weaving." The masked man's arms were still folded across his chest, stoic and unreadable in every way. Hidan continued to try, despite this. Somewhere in that heartless bastard was someone who cared enough to keep putting up with him, if he was really that bad.

"What about you?"

"Don't ask stupid questions Hidan."

"Tch. Go collect stamps or something you fuckin' geezer."

---

"Itachi Uchiha."

"Hm?"

Shikamaru stared at the mere shadow of a man, ignoring the sharingan that bore into him. He was struggling to keep the emotion from his features, much to his disappointment, but the important thing is that he was succeeding.

"Are you following me?" Itachi asked in monotone.

"I want into your organization."

The eldest of the Uchihases eyebrows both jumped high and the corners of his mouth twitched. Shikamaru thought maybe this was his interpretation of a laugh. He held back the grimace that threatened its presence.

"Don't look at me like that. You and I both know what I'm talking about. I want in."

He was regarded for what felt like hours but couldn't have been more than a few seconds. "What makes you think I'm taking applications."

His tone said it wasn't a question, it was more a demand for Shikamaru to leave before he got himself in trouble. The spikey haired man sighed and shifted his posture. "You probably know that Hidan and I have... and extremely weird sort of friendship. It was more or less forced on me but in all honesty.. Well, I know he's more than he acts. He believes whole-heartedly that you are a good person, worthy of the second chance he was given. And from what I understand, this group of yours actually has a remarkably noble cause."

Itachi stared, not seeming intrigued by Shikamaru's words, but not showing complete disinterest either.

"I've been working in the pathetic excuse for a law enforcement field for a long time. I'm sick of the corruption, I'm sick of the complete lack of honor it exemplifies, I want out. I have for a long time. But, I thought perhaps I would be more use having each foot in a different doorway, so to speak."

His chest was growing tight, The man wasn't moving. Part of him thought that he might not be there anymore, that he'd been put under an illusion, that he only thought he was seeing Itachi Uchiha, when in reality he was talking to a lightpost.

"Do you think I'm a fool?"

Shikamaru couldn't help the mixture of freight and surprise that overwhelmed his movements.

"You are naive, and you should be embarrassed for it, especially with the strategic mind you have. Hidan is a scatterbrained moron, but none-the-less he should not be taken lightly. However, all the bits and pieces that you're paying attention to, they're the opposite of what you should be concerning yourself with. It's the other half of the puzzle you should be working on."

Shikamaru tried to protest, but he was interrupted before he could even turn the thoughts to words. "Regardless, I've heard you. If we wish to consult you further, we will seek you out. Don't think I'll be letting you follow me again. You've been warned, Nara."

And with the the man was gone. He didn't burst into a cloud of ravens, he didn't leap away, within the blink of an eye he'd literally just disappeared. Shikamaru stared, lips parted in the sentence he still wanted to say, but didn't. He sighed, and looked around, his skin crawling with the feeling that though the elder Uchiha brother wasn't in sight, he was still there.

And there he was, eyes narrowed as he watched Shikamaru trod away, hands in his pockets.

It was inane how something so simple could be turned into something so complicated with the mindless ease of making the wrong assumption.

---

"Your little plaything next door wants to join."

"Sweet Fucking Jashin! Quit sneaking up on me like that..."

"What do you intend to do about this?"

Hidan paused, staring at the half-formed man floating in front of him. "Quit doing that, it's fucking creepy." The ghost of Itachi did not reply, and simply watched, emotionless, as Hidan paced. His hand was to his chin in thought, and the albino, had he been wearing a shirt, might actually have looked intelligent for a moment.

"Why don't we let him?"

The illusion raised a brow.

"Yeah, Oh fuck yea! That'd be so perfect! That would make everything work out. Aw shit why didn't I think of that?"

"What makes you think this would be a good idea?"

"Why wouldn't it?" Hidan retorted, and not hearing a reply, he continued. "Dude, he's got all the information of the cops on his side, plus he has the influence. You're so worried about our name going out to the public, *he* can make sure it doesn't. It's fuckin' perfect! Plus if he's as smart as everyone fuckin says, then why the hell not? I guarantee he's already close to figuring out who the guy runnin around killing everyone is."

The ghost Itachi was still silent, but the expression had changed to one of consideration.

"Hidan, He's not like you, or me."

"What are you talking about?"

"I see what you're trying to do, you think I haven't noticed how you've been acting? Kakuzu is worried you'll do something stupid. You have this *fascination* with him, it's unhealthy."

It was Hidan's turn to keep quiet. And the fake Uchiha sighed. "You need to admit to yourself that even demons like you crave friendship and understanding. You are my closest friend, but I need to advise you against this. He doesn't have a history like we do, he could never understand, he won't accept you when he finds out the things you've done."

" *Advise me?* Tch, you're not the boss of me. Leading on this case has gone to your head."

"I'm telling you as a friend. Ditch him."

"Fuck off, I know what I'm doing."

"If you say so."

The ghost evaporated, leaving Hidan alone in his backyard, conflicting emotions unhidden on his features. He looked up as the sound of none other than the Nara's car echoed up to him, and he grinned, wiping the blood from his lip and failing miserably to stop the bleeding from his stomach. Jashin might be pleased with the deep wound, but others had a tendency to shy away from gushing holes in the body.

He waved far too happily as Shikamaru pulled up, and was surprised to actually get a response back. The dark haired man considered him for a moment after parking and getting out of the car, and,

astounding the albino even more, started making his way over to him.

"What are you doing?" He asked, knowing full well what the response would be.

"Right now? Just trying not to scream from the ecstasy of a blood sacrifice to the great and mighty Jashin."

"Mmhmm. Sounds fun."

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Hidan said, licking his lips and regarding the man with a hungry look that made Shikamaru want to take a step back, or fifty. He resisted the urge and rolled his eyes.

"Are you going to attack me again?"

"Depends." Hidan said, bending down to retrieve his weapon, the same one he'd used while 'testing' Shikamaru over at his house. "Did you like it?"

"Why the hell would I like that?" He said, letting the amusement show on his face. Once you were past the annoying, obnoxious, loud, sexual, belligerent swearing, Hidan was actually kind of... fun? entertaining? Something to that degree.

"Nothing gets the adrenaline going like fighting for your life. Except maybe taking one." Hidan smirked, and Shikamaru tried not to let it show how much that comment bothered him.

"I'm kidding, chill the fuck out. Well maybe I am. Iunno, I'll let you decide."

*'What the hell was that supposed to mean?'* Shikamaru thought.

"So why you buggin' me pineapple head? You never come over, you ass."

He straightened and cleared his throat, almost angry for getting distracted by Hidan's crude humor. "I had a chat with your friend today, I wanted to talk to you about it too."

"Ohh, yea. He told me. The fuck are you thinking going to him for it, you know how much trouble I could get in? They'll think I told you."

Shikamaru smirked, and Hidan flinched, actually catching on for once. "Awe shit. I just did didn't I."

"Well, Mister Uchiha didn't exactly deny the fact that this club exists and that you're in it. But, I had already figured that out.."

"Son of a bitch..."

"So he told you I want in?"

"Yea, what the fuck?"

Shikamaru stared, feigning confusion.

"Why the hell do you want to join. We're criminals as far as you're concerned."

"Criminals?"

"Okay well, ex-criminals mister smartass."

"What did you do?"

Hidan paused just before saying something, and his mouth snapped shut as he looked Shikamaru up and down, "None of your fucking business. It happened a long time ago, doesn't matter."

"Uh huh. And uh, you doing illegal drugs just this morning counts as a long time ago?"

"Hey shitface, I stay in my fucking designated yard and don't endanger anyone else, they can't kill me, I was granted Immunity. I'm

obeying the precious rules, so fuck off."

Hmm, that was interesting. Shikamaru made a mental note to ask Asuma about that, he'd wondered why no one seemed to care that the man was running around naked destroying things while high as a kite.

"You just chewed up the power lines a few days ago."

"Tch, I'd like to see you prove that."

"Well, your burned skin and saliva would probably do a damn good job of proving it."

"Motherfucker I cleaned that shit. You won't find anything."

"So you're admitting to tampering with evidence?"

Hidan's face had become flushed and he was stuttering to think of a comeback. Shikamaru could tell by the vein in his head and his white knuckles taht he was very close to throttling him, but the war going on in his head was reflected in his eyes and he didn't think the Jashinist would go through with it.

"I just fucking with you man." He chuckled, and Hidan relaxed for only a moment before his anger returned.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH BASTARD! That's not fucking funny!"

"Sucks to be on the other end huh?"

"I'm gonna fuckin' kill you in your sleep."

"Hey, don't dish it out if you can't take it."

"Tch, go fuck your little girly man and leave me alone. Seriously."

Shikamaru chuckled and let his expression grow serious. "Really though Hidan." The albino stopped at the mention of his name, And



Shikamaru swallowed, had he said it strangely? he'd called him by his name before, why was it having an effect now? "I want in. I don't think your buddy is going to let me. Can you put in a good word?"

Hidan turned slowly, his face dark but void. Shikamaru forced himself to remain nonchalant, he would not let Hidan know he was scared of him, and he was having trouble believing it himself. Shikamaru wasn't really afraid of people, maybe Neji, but that was in a different way.

"Why would I do that?"

Shikamaru shifted his weight to his other foot, pushing out the air of indifference, forcing it. "Because, maybe the initiation can be me fighting you, to prove myself. Don't tell me your sadistic little self wouldn't get a kick out of that."

"Fighting you eh? No holding back? I can use my scythe?"

*Scythe?* He actually fought with a fucking scythe? Shikamaru had thought it was just compensation for something...

"Uh, yea. So long as you don't kill me, I imagine that would probably foul up your records. And would be a major drag for me.."

"Hn, Jashin could grant you immortality, and we could fight for real. That would be like a fucking clash of the titans."

"Awe?" Shikamaru purred, "I didn't know you thought so Highly of me?"

"I don't." Hidan spat, his lip curling. "I just wanna fight you. You're quick, and I wanna see that revered strategic mind in action."

"Then help me out?" Shikamaru shrugged, smiling expectantly.

Hidan stared at him for a few minutes, eyes narrowed. "Why are you acting so wierd?"

"Huh?"

Hidan put his hand to his chin. "First, you're not pissed to see me. Then you actually come over to talk to *me*, then you pull my own type of shit on me... This ain't all cause you fucking want in the Akatsuki that bad is it?"

The Nara sighed, slouching. "You said yourself that I'm miserable doing what I'm doing."

"Yea, cuz you have a lot of responsibility. adding this on top is just gonna make it fuckin' worse, not better."

"Well at least then I'll feel like I'm doing something. the system I work for now is so corrupted and lazy, they've lost all their morals, they slack off and managed to get a bigger paycheck at the same time. This side of the law isn't working, So I figure I can try out the other."

Hidan's expression ent terrifyingly serious.

"This isn't something you can try and quit if you don't like it, pineapple head. trust me, the guys don't fucking take kindly to that shit."

"You tried to get out?"

Hidan shrugged, still remaning solemn. "It got in the way of Jashin and his glory. His demands must be met."

"But you're still part of it."

"Yea, cos' I'm not fucking stupid enough to face leader's wrath."

Shikamaru kept his face straight, Hidan was vomiting information, maybe he didn't even need to go through with this...

"What'd you do?"

"I fucking learned to work around it." Hidan shifted, a slightest tick of anxiety flicking across him. "Anyway, whatever, if you're serious about it, I'll have a chat. Otherwise, go home, fucking forget this conversation happened. And if you blab to anyone," Hidan took a giant step and leaned forward to put his face inches from Shikamaru's, noses only millimeters from touching. "And I mean anyone.." he murmured, sneering. "I'll kill you and I'll kill your pretty little bitch too. Doesn't matter where you go, how much money you get, what kind of protection you hire, I'll getcha."

He leaned back, his face regaining it's usual amused composure. "Get it?"

Shikamaru nodded, swallowing hard.

"Good. Now leave me alone, you made my high wear off."

Shikamaru silently trodded away, Hidan's words heavy on his mind. He wasn't afraid of him, he wouldn't let himself be. The man was an idiot. An idiot that couldn't die and had no remorse, but still an idiot.

---

A/N-

Kinda mostly just drabble. Sorry. I know I said shit would get interesting, but I think these few little things were important. It makes things easier to understand, and if you haven't noticed I've pretty well given up trying to keep you confused. Now I just want to keep you reading. xD

Anyways, enjoy and review!

## Chapter 9

### Bad neighbors

---

"What were you talking to him about?" Neji asked, having opened the door just before Shikamaru had grabbed the handle. He just looked up to his lover, tired. He really couldn't keep his nose out of it...

"I thought you were washing your hands of it." He muttered, attempting to push past him.

Neji let him pass, but followed right on his heels. It was clear that he was ticked, but quite frankly Shikamaru was getting tired of his accusations. Neji's trust was slipping, and it bugged the hell out of him.

"Yeah, but that doesn't mean I'm suddenly going to be okay with you chatting up the psycho next door. How the hell could you just sit out there talking to him for the whole world to see when he's covered in his own blood like that? And why the hell did he get so close to you?"

"Really? You're jelous of Hidan?"

"Since when do you call him by his name?"

"Since I realized that underneath all the crazy he's actually a real person."

Neji threw his hands up and turned around, walking off a few steps before facing him again. "I can't beleive you! A real person. Did you forget that he's been mentally torturing you, and has on more than one occasion *physically* injured me?"

"You *did* kind of cause it the first time."

Neji looked at him as if he'd just been slapped.

"Can we please not do this? Can't we just skip this part and go straight to the part where you tell me you trust me and know that I know what I'm doing?"

"Fine." Neji spat. "You wanted me to react honestly, and that's what I'm doing. Don't bitch about it."

Shika's lips parted in understanding as Neji stalked off. He pinched the bridge of his nose, what a DRAAAG! He whirled around and then stopped, he might actually have to fight Hidan, full force...

He shook his head, it would be fine. Everything was going accordingly, All he had to do was get inducted into the Akatsuki, and things would start looking up. Asuma surely wouldn't like it when he found out. And yes, it was a 'when', not an 'if'. Shikamaru couldn't keep secrets from the man, he was like a second father, and he would probably figure out some time down the road anyway. Besides, he would keep a secret for him..

Shikamaru's brow furrowed. Good God, he sure hoped he could keep a secret for him.

---

It was well into the evening before Shikamaru finally heard the abuse of his door, the timing couldn't have been more perfect. Neji had gone to bed early, refusing to give Shikamaru anything more than one word replies, and quit frankly he was tired of bickering with him. Why couldn't the diva just trust him? It's not like he was putting Neji in any danger, and shikamaru could damn well take care of himself. *He knew what he was doing.* But it didn't seem to matter how many times he repeated that phrase. No one seemed to believe him, and it irked him to no end that the most important people in his life turned their backs on him, and out of all the people in the world, the psycho next door was the only one who admitted his intellect. Sure, it was in a way as asinine as declaring how badly he wanted to cause

shikamaru bodily harm, but that he deemed him worthy was a compliment.

At least, he was going to take it that way.

Shikamaru steps with brisk, quiet steps to the door and opened it, putting his index finger to his lips. Though in retrospect, he found it to be kind of a stupid idea, Hidan didn't like Neji, why would he be considerate for him?

Howeve, he hadn't needed to give the warning, Hidan was standing silently, his face in just the slightest of a frown, and without saying anything (a miracle in itself) he nodded to Shikamaru and gestured for him to follow. Shikamaru complied, squinting to see in the dark, seeing as the streetlight on their side of the lot still wasn't properly receiving power from the lines Hidan had gnawed. How their house still did was a mystery even to the Nara.

The long silent walk grated on his nerves, and he was dieing to ask where the hell Hidan was leading him. The town had been left long behind, and he wasn't almost angry with the Albino for not letting him take his car. He struggled to keep his mouth shut though, If the zealot was being quiet, this had to be one hell of a serious matter, and the long black robe and scythe attached to his back only emphasized that.

This wasn't just a scythe either, Shikamaru noted, and his brow creased as he imagined Hidan's fighting style. With three blades, each smaller but sharper than the last, and a retractable cord that looked like it wound its way into his sleeve... That meant Hidan was probably best with moderatley ranged attacking, A scythe was not as easy to swing as a katana or pike. Oh, that's right, he had those bigass stakes hidden somewhere on his person too... Those were up-close and-personal weapons... Damn. He still had no idea what Hidan was capable of...

He'd stillnever seen the man in combat, he'd swung those sharp sticks at Shikamaru sure, but that had been in his house with all

kinds of furniture in the way and limited space, and he also had the sneaking suspicion that it had sort of been an impulsive decision. *Protocol, my ass.* He'd turned down Jashinism and was still alive, apparently that site really hadn't been so accurate. Hell, as far as he knew the whole thing could have been made up.

*It's still going as planned.* He told himself, taking comfort in the fact that Hidan having weapons at all meant he wasn't all that skilled at Jutsu. And Neji had told him about the strange flow of His chakra.. Maybe he had some sort of condition.. Or maybe the whole being immortal thing took up so much of his life's energy that he couldn't safely use other types of jutsu.

Hidan turned suddenly to the left, leaving the highway and skidding down the sharp decline and vaulting over the barbwire fence, He turned back to make sure Shikamaru was following before continueing on into the foliage. And Shikamaru, struggling with the muddy slope, felt his heart jump a little bit. He was leading him into the woods, past the city limits...

Something in him shifted and he struggled not to turn and flee. Half of his head shrieked and cried that Hidan knew, that he knew everything and he was taking him out here where he could kill him without any witnesses. Hell, he would probably sacrifice him to that demon God and Shikamaru's soul would be trapped forever in some even more demented version of Hell.

He shoke his head violently as he reached the fence, "Dammit.." He muttered. Now even he wasn't trusting himself. This was his element, this is what he was good at. He fucking *knew* what he was *doing* . And after taking a steadying breath, he jumped the wire and trudged in after Hidan, Hoping to whatever omnipitent being that might be watching him that he was right.

The trek through the woods took a good half hour, Hidan seemed to get more and more agitated as they trudged on, mumbling under his breath. Shikamaru's confidence was slowly draining at each inaudible word that escaped the man's mouth. He'd realized now that

the normally loudmouth Jashinist wasn't silent out of respect for the situation, but because he was pissed, and he could only deduce from this that he hadn't got what he wanted. And the only thing Shikamaru could think of that could have been denied him was the chance to fight the Nara. And this left a deeply unsettling feeling in the pit of his stomach, seeing as he could safely assume that all the persons that came and went to his neighbors house were in the organization, any one of them could have taken his place. Or worse yet they might have come up with some other way for Shikamaru to prove himself.

And that was troublesome, definitely not according to plan.

Finally, *finally* they entered into a clearing, obviously man-made, and Shikamaru stifled his sigh of relief at seeing a lone figure standing in the middle. The only light was the faint glow of the moon, yet the silhouette was unmistakable, as were the red glow of the Sharingan. They felt as if burning into him as they approached, and he realized that he had subconsciously slipped in step behind Hidan as a means to escape the glare. His unease was replaced by annoyance that he was afraid, and moreover that he was using the zealot in a manner of protection.

"Alright red-eyes, I brought him way the fuck out here. No one followed, where the hell Barbie?"

*Barbie?* Shikamaru's eyes flicked around, *that blonde, un-gendered person?*

"He will be here." Itachi replied, his eyes flicking between the two. Shikamaru stopped at the Uchiha's raised hand.

"Shikamaru Nara. I'm sure you understand your presence here."

He nodded, refusing to break eye contact, and Itachi repeated the gesture.



"Because you're so adamant about this, we've been granted permission to access your skills. Know well that this is not any sort of initialization, it's merely a test. The outcome will not determine whether you shall be joining us, but will merely give us means to discuss why you should or should not be permitted to include yourself in our endeavors."

Hidan snorted, having settled himself on the ground ten feet behind and to the side of Itachi, who jerked to send a glare in his direction. Hidan was unfazed, "Just hurry up will ya? I've got better things to do than fucking sit here and watch this shit. Everyone already knows what I want."

"I'm assuming that I'm not going to be combating with Hidan then." Shikamaru finally spoke up, surprised at how calm his voice was.

Itachi eyed him calmly, "You do not get to decide what you do to prove yourself, despite your attempts to trick Hidan into thinking it was *his* idea. I would be commendable, except... It's Hidan."

"Hey FUCK you!"

Itachi continued on, ignoring the outburst. "Your test, Shikamaru Nara, will be survival."

The spikey haired man let his surprise show. Survival? So they were going to leave him out here in the woods for a week? He wasn't even that far from town, he could just walk back.

The distant fluttering of wings brought his attention up to the sky, Hidan's gaze flicked up with him. A big white awkward looking bird floated over the clearing, and Hidan laughed obnoxiously, most likely at Shikamaru's expression. The bird, or... whatever it was, circled around before swooping down to land, and his heart sank into his stomach at seeing the blonde man-woman hop down off it's back, giving Shikamaru a smile that he assumed was supposed to be threatening.

"Blondie you better not fucking kill him, I still want my turn."

"Shut up Hidan, you got turned down, deal with it. Hn."

*Holy shit*, Shikamaru failed to stifle a laugh, and the blonde person who he now realized was actually a man jerked around to glare at him, as if knowing why he laughed.

"Hey!? Are you *laughing at me*? I'm gonna blow you to bits pineapple headed freak!"

Shikamaru ignored his threat to look back at Itachi questioningly. But he had stepped back and was standing next to Hidan, who was now sitting crosslegging with his elbows on his knees and his arms propping up his chin. He looked like a little sulking kid.

"Pay Attention yeah?" Deidara snapped, and Shikamaru's attention begrudgingly returned to him. He had taken a few steps forward and had his arms folded across him. "There are bombs all around this clearing, and circled all the way around behind you. They go off when they sense chakra getting near. You go that way, you die, hn."

Shikamaru watched as he held up a hand and a white spider crawled into his palm. And his eyes widened, they were sculptures, infused with chakra..

"And they move, they hide themselves, so don't think you can just memorize their positions."

Shikamaru swallowed and glanced around, *What the hell had he gotten himself into?*

"There is one patch, ten feet wide that's not rigged, you have to find it, and after that, make your way back to town without going boom, Yeah?"

He paused, his grin irritatingly close to Hidans, as if asking Shikamaru if he had any questions. The Nara looked around once

more, and brought up his hand to scratch his neck. "You're probably going to be flying around throwing more bombs at me aren't you?"

Deidara nodded, Making that annoying 'hn' sound. Blondes must get speech impediments more often, he knew another annoying blonde idiot with one too.

"This sounds *really* troublesome.."

"Tch, This shits easy compared to what I had to pull out my ass." Hidan said as Deidara returned to his wierd bird. The blond snorted and rolled his eyes, opening his mouth most likely to make fun of the Albino, but snapping it back shut at the sharp glare he received from Itachi.

Shikamaru sighed, doing his best to hide his smile. Either Itachi was purposefully giving him an easy task, or they didn't know what his signature Jutsu was. The only question now was to drag this on or hurry up and get it over with.

Neji was at home alone, he would probably be mad that Shikamaru had left without telling him or leaving a note.

He popped his knuckles, slowly and individually. Oh well, business was business.

---

A/N- Ooooooh snap. was this a short chapter? It feels like it was short. Sorry, but damn, this took a really long time, I'm not even sure why, nothing really even happened. Maybe that's why, it was jjust so boring. It takes me like half an hour to write out an actiony chapter, lol. o.o That's a lie, it takes longer, but you get the idea.

REVIEW!

## Chapter 10

A/N- Warning, probably going to be more Ooc-ness in this chapter, mostly because the character's past has been changing, not really dramatically, but changed none-the-less. Also, the addition of non-canon jutsu's, actually, they're in the anime, but they don't belong to this particular person. I just borrowed it for reasons I don't feel like I need to explain, it's called creative freedom. . Forgive me.

### Bad Neighbors

---

AS the blonde took off up to the skies, Shikamaru casually sat on the ground, mimicking Hidan's posture. He clasped his palms together, index fingers pointing upward, and blinked slowly while taking a deep breath and letting it go.

Deidara snickered from directly above and let slip a small bomb with a single wing-like appendage sticking out from it. The chunk of clay helicoptered down in the uneasy silence, and Hidan cleared his throat in warning, as if Shikamaru wasn't aware of it.

The Nara just smiled and muttered the invocation word for his jutsu, and immediately the entirety of the shadows that had made a border around the clearing slipped away from where they were and came to circle around him. Hidan yelped, but before any attention could be given to him the shadows shot from the ground, becoming tangible black tentacles. One of them slapped the bomb away while two more reached up to the blonde on his clay bird with unrealistic speed. The discarded sculpture hit the ground and burst as another tentacle, this one still two-dimensional stretched out past it. A whole series of explosions echoed up through the clearings as the remaining shadows on the ground stretched out and writhed their way around, meanwhile the ones in the air continued to dart around trying to catch Deidara, who was just barely managing to keep himself and his mount free.

Shikamaru grinned at the blonde when their eyes met, happy just for wiping the smug look from the drag-queens face. Deidara scowled in return and growled out some profanity when one of the three-dimensional shadows clipped one of the wings of his fake bird.

While still in mid-air he leapt from the thing, and it went sailing down to the ground as he tossed another sculpture out. In the blink of an eye and a puff of smoke the second hunk of clay had swelled to the size of the previous bird, only this one was thinner and resembled something closer to a dragon, being much more aero-dynamic, Shikamaru assumed. Deidara made some weird noise that was somewhere between a sneeze and what might have been an actual word, and the giant bird detonated, Causing Itachi to take an unrealistically large leap to the side and out of harms way. Hidan remained in his position, his face twisted in an expression that could only be expressed as being too pissed to think.

He ignored this action though, and slowly stood from the ground, his hands still clasped but for index fingers. He couldn't help the slight smile as he mumbled another phrase and let his hands fall to his sides. He reached up, over, and behind his shoulder, knowing full well that amidst the chaos above, Deidara was still keeping an eye trained carefully on him. The blonde also somehow managed to toss out another bomb that was easily slapped away by a black tentacle, and it only made the corner of Shikamaru mouth twitch upward further. He pulled his hand back, and stifled the sneer he so badly wanted to make at Deidara's boggled expression. He didn't have anything in his hand, but his hand was being held carefully as if he did. He then turned and started running backward, toward the clearing he'd come in, his shadows disarming all the hidden bombs as he ran, making an incredibly effective smoke screen. Deidara followed after him, clinging to his dragon-mount as it twisted and jerked to evade the still attacking tentacles.

"You think you can just run away from this? It's not going to be that easy Yeah?!" He shouted into the dust cloud, and grimaced at the yelp that escaped him as the sculpture was yanked out from under

him with such force that he was sent spiraling downward. He desperately tried reaching for his satchel, but the movement made it difficult to stop flailing his arms around in an attempt to regain control of himself as he plummeted.

"Kah-Katsu!" He heard himself squeal, and the dragon, wherever it had been, exploded with a force that knocked him to back into a controlled fall, and he winced from the debris that had come flinging at him along with it.

Finally, he made the movement to reach backward into his clay pouch, but before he could think, the three-dimensional shadow rocketed up to him and in less than a second had him bound tight enough to force the air from his lungs.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH!" He roared when he was allowed to take a breath. "I'm gonna fucking kill you where you stand! How the fucking hell did you attack me from behind! I watched you the entire fucking time, you didn't make a clone!"

The dust had settled now and Shikamaru stood confidently before him, he rolled his eyes at the blonde's rantings and turned to Itachi, who was standing over an unconscious Hidan sprawled out among the destruction a few yards away, the albino appeared to be burnt rather badly as well. Itachi only stared down at him with the slightest crease of concern, and looked up to meet Shikamaru's gaze.

"Interesting. I must admit I didn't think you'd resort to using Hidan like that."

Shikamaru only shrugged as Deidara gawked at the older Uchiha, obviously understanding. His blue eyes flicked over to where Hidan's scythe lay discarded on the ground, the retractable cord having been burned away in the blast. But the crispy remains of a chunk of clay was unmistakable, having been stabbed clean through by all three of the blades of Hidan's weapon.

"You freaking *fished* me out of the air!? No way! hn!"

"It's difficult enough to control all that shadow energy, Hidan was the easiest way to conserve my chakra and still get the job done. Besides, I knew he'd be oblivious enough not to notice I had caught him in my jutsu until it was too late." Shikamaru said, continuing to ignore Deidara who was squirming in the grip of the tentacle.

"Let me the hell down yeah? This is downright degrading!" the blonde finally surrendered, and Shikamaru complied, the shift in the air evident as he relaxed and his chakra returned to his body, the shadows seemed to dissolve right then and there to reappear in their proper place. Deidara dusted himself off and crossed his arms, the only thing missing was sticking out his lower lip. Shikamaru stifled a laugh at this and returned his attention to Itachi, who had snuck up next to him.

"The way your mind works is interesting, I'll give you that. I'll admit I expected you to be dead by now, not standing here, victorious."

"Ah, quit rubbing it in yeah? I slipped up, I say it doesn't count, hn, we didn't know what he could do!"

"That was the point of the exersize Deidara." he said, glaring, and the blonde snapped his mouth shut. "Make yourself useful and go attend to Hidan. "

"He's going to be pissed to all hell when he wakes up." Shikamaru muttered, shoulder slouching from exhaustion and his prediction.

Itachi nodded at this, and considered something for a moment. "You will be contacted when a decision has been-" A flicker of annoyance crossed the Sharingan users face as the ring of a cell phone bleated into the air. Shikamaru's heart skipped a beat as he realized it was his, he'd brought his phone with him? When did that happen, it must have just been habit to shove it in his pocket.

He regarded the look on Itachi's face before he reached to answer it, it seemed he was only upset to be interrupted, and was now waiting patiently for Shikamaru to silence it so he could continue. But it didn't happen, as he pulled the phone out and saw Asuma's number, he held a finger up to Itachi, who's eyes narrowed.

His boss absolutely never called him unless it was important, it was always a secretary, always. In fact, he'd received maybe 2 phone calls in all the years he'd been working there that came directly from Asuma's cell.

"This is Nara." He said after flipping it open, wondering why Itachi was still waiting patiently. He couldn't quite decide if it was possibly curiosity to duty to make sure Shikamaru understood what would happen as far as his involvement in the Akatsuki from here on out.

"Shikamaru what the hell is going on? That damn button of yours has been going off for the last half hour, I've sent 6 cars over there already! What have you gotten yourself into?"

"The backup button?" He said, his hand moving on its own to come to a rest over the pocket opposite the one he'd pulled his phone from. There wasn't a lump there. The button wasn't there...

His eyes went wide and he nearly collapsed as the recollection suddenly hit him. Good God he'd left it on the kitchen counter. He remembered setting it down there, Neji had eyed it before storming off without a word. He'd forgotten to grab it when Hidan showed up. Oh fuck, if this had gone wrong, he would be dead by now, he wouldn't have had any back up! How could he be so stupid!

"Shikamaru!"

Asuma's voice snapped him back for only a moment before he was struck with a second thought.

"Neji..." He almost whispered, absently meeting Itachi's eyes. The Uchiha tilted his head slightly and raised his brows, and the Nara



couldn't tell if he was asking him to hurry up with his phone call, or wondering what happened.

"Oh God, Neji has the button, he's the one hitting it! Asuma!" He all but shouted the last into the phone, "Get to my house! I'll meet you there!" He slapped the device shut before the man on the other end had time to protest, and quickly searched through his missed calls. He hadn't had any from Neji. No, of course he hadn't, his phone didn't ring, it was on loud still.

If Neji had resorted to using that button, and hadn't had the chance to call Shikamaru, that meant something was horribly wrong. His stomach did a somersault as he imagined the house on fire after Neji accidentally left the burner on. He saw the car careening off into one of the steep ditches on the side of the road as Neji sped in his angry search for Shikamaru, who had left him at home without a note or any way to know where he was for the *second fucking time* in a matter of days.

He whirled around to Deidara.

"Make a bird!" He shouted, his steps long and quick and he closed the distance between them. The blonde only scowled at him. "Why the hell would I do that, hm?"

"MAKE A FUCKING BIRD!" Shikamaru screamed, surprising himself as his hand shot out to grab Deidara around the throat. It was caught by the same almost feminine-looking hand that had stolen his knife from him so easily that day in the middle of the road. Itachi was before him somehow, blocking Deidara from harm and staring calmly at Shikamaru with sharingan blazing.

"Deidara. Please make us transportation. We don't have a lot of time." Itachi stated, and Deidara, though still scowling, took a few steps back and reached into his satchel.

"Shikamaru, help me get Hidan up onto it, he still has four or five minutes until he comes-to."

Shikamaru fought with his emotions, racing back and forth between panic for Neji, guilt for having 'killed' Hidan after using him as a tool just to pass some stupid test, and curiosity as to why Itachi was helping him.

"No time to lose, mister Nara." Itachi said, one brow raised in question as he bent down to wrap one of Hidan's arms around his shoulder and motioned to Deidara to retrieve the scythe.

Shikamaru shook his head, scattering his confusion for only a heartbeat before they came swarming back. None-the-less, he repeated the action and together they hauled the unconscious, bleeding Jashinist over to the giant clay pelican. Hidan was tossed in its mouth, something that probably would have struck Shikamaru as hilarious if he wasn't so preoccupied with other concerns.

Itachi leapt up onto the sculpture with ease and instantly helped Shikamaru up, and before he knew it they were in the air. It would be only a few minutes before they were at his house, but that was still far too long..

---

"Any other bodies to throw at me?"

Neji's breaths came out ragged, and the blood dripping from his scalp was starting to sting in his eye. He was silent, ignoring his attacker's questions in order to more properly use the time to try to think up means of escape. He'd given up the notion of kicking this guy's ass to the moon and back, he was unrealistically strong.

Neji took a step back, wincing in fright as he bumped into a corner, and wincing again as his shoulder nudged it as well. It was hanging limply, the dark bruise showing through his sweat-soaked shirt where his shoulder should be was a dark reminder that physical attacks were useless.

"Good, now let's get this over with."

"H-how could you.." Neji was interrupted by a lightning infused blade narrowly missing his stomach as he jerked to the side to avoid it. He couldn't help the cry of pain he released at moving his tattered body so suddenly, and his attacker only smiled, dark eyes gleaming in amusement.

"Please, Shikamaru is on the police force now, we can help you out of whatever agreement you made, get you protection-AGH!" He cried out again as he dodged another swipe of the weapon, diving forward and rolling as a foot slammed down where his throat would have been, crashing through the floor with the chakra enhanced strength. Hot tears ran down his cheeks, partly from being scared for his life, partly from the pain, and a third part from exhaustion. Where the hell was Shikamaru? Where the hell was anyone? Even that idiot next door didn't come running at the sound of destruction and pain, as much as he hated to say he wished he was here...

"You can't offer what I need. Now quit blubbering and die with dignity." His attacker grunted the last part, swinging a chakra laden fist toward Neji, switching it to an open handed lightning-based attack at the last moment. It came within millimeters of Neji, who lost a large chunk of hair in exchange for keeping his head.

Once again Neji leaped backward to put distance between them, his palm rotation hadn't worked the last 3 times he'd tried it, gentle fist was too slow, which said a lot for the attackers speed, and the trigram routines weren't having much more effect either, Not in this small enclosed area at least.

The house was beyond trashed, they'd have to save up for a millenia to replace everything that had died-in-action, and this thought alone only worsened Neji's state. He was going to die, Shikamaru was probably dead somewhere else as well if he hadn't come by now, and there was no hope left.

His brow furrowed in sudden anger that gave him the strength to knock aside a fist and deliver a sharp jab to his attackers gut. They winced, and went in for another strike with the blade, electricity

making it glow. Shikamaru, that bastard. How could he do this to him, this couldn't be part of his plan, and if it was it was even worse. He'd fucking left Neji in the house alone, most likely drawn off by the promise of drugs by that albino idiot, and he'd probably freaking been attacked and killed so that no one could come to Neji's rescue, except the scattered bodies of policemen draped across his livingroom. They hadn't even had time to call for more powerful backup before they were dead where they stood.

And now he was going to die, just like all those other jutsu users, innocent and young with promising futures, and it was all Shikamaru's fault. Why couldn't the asshole just let him in on his plans? He asked trust constantly but never gave it...

He blocked another grunt and let out a snarl as he saw an opportunity and jabbed the man 32 times in his chakra points. His attacker staggered backward and Neji rasped out a breath, blinking hard. His vision was blurring every now and then, he hadn't used his byakugan so much and so constantly in quite a long awhile. But to not use it meant certain death, he couldn't seem to keep from looking at the man's eyes, and without his visual prowess to combat him, he was done-for. He would probably slit his own throat with no more encouragement than a glance.

Damn that ..that... that pineapple headed *fuck*.

"Sasuke?!"

The third voice made Neji's focus shift to over his attackers shoulder, and the man used it to his advantage, rushing forward with the blade, going in for the kill. Neji watched it happen and tensed against the pain to dive out of the way, and just as he did another figure lept into the spot where he would have been, knocking the sword off course with a flick of a wrist that knocked it from the assassin's hand and sent it clacking to the wooden floors, just a normal old katana now.

"NEJI!" Shikamaru's voice shouted, the strain of concern more than obvious. Neji stayed where he was on the floor, emotions warring within him even as he felt familiar hands wrap around his torso and haul him up into an embrace. The brunette shrieked in pain and apologies came gushing out of his lover's mouth.

"What the fuck is your brother doing here red-eyes!" Neji heard Hidan shout, and rolled his eyes, everything going blurry. The calvary was here, apparently, even though it consisted of the two people Neji hated most in the world right now, with the exception of Itachi. He didn't hate him, but he sure as hell wasn't fond of the guy either.

He could be grateful though, he would push aside his pride for that at the least. He'd distracted Sasuke from his barrage of attacks, and Neji could let down the Byakugan and rest for a moment. After the pain behind his eyes left, he was hit with wave after wave of excruciating pain to remind him that the rest of his body was badly battered as well, and he let the tears fall freely. Fuck dignity, this fucking hurt.

A shouting match erupted from the two brothers, along with more crashing, and Neji buried his face deeper into Shikamaru's chest, mumbling "I hate you for this." over and over. The Nara either didn't hear him or didn't know how to respond, most likely distracted by the fight going on between the Uchihas.

"Quit interfering in my life!" Sasuke shouted, having regained his weapon, he was swinging again and again at the older Uchiha, but with controlled movement and a grace that was haunting to Shikamaru.

"Sasuke, stop this." Itachi said calmly, dodging each assault and only returning aggression when he had to. In his concentration in the fight, his face was wrought with unmasked inner pain at this terrible excuse for a reunion.

"I.. I can't believe it.." Shikamaru muttered, absently stroking Neji's back, they had moved to the tattered couch to make the Hyuga

slightly more comfortable. "It was Sasuke? He was the killer? How.. *how* ?"

"Jumping to conclusions doesn't do any good, even to you, pineapple head." Hidan said solemnly, seating himself on the other side of Neji. Shikamaru's gaze met his and his heart wrenched. Hidan had known, he'd known Shikamaru was playing him along the entire time to get him to confess. And he'd done nothing to stop it...

"What are you doing!? Go help him!" Shikamaru snapped, pushing back the guilt. He didn't have time to second-guess himself right now. How the hell was he supposed to know, everything had pointed to the Jashinist, even the man himself!

Hidan shook his head and looked over to the sparring brothers. "Nah, this is a family thing, he'd kick my ass if I interfered."

"You're not worried about him?"

"Tch, Red-eyes has always been stronger than that fucking runt, seriously. If there's anyone who can control him, it's Itachi."

Their calm conversation amidst the chaos was ended when the sound of wood and paneling violently breaking brought all their attention back up, a blur of Sasuke leaped out through the new hole in the wall. Shikamaru and Hidan's eyes met, "He just kicked him through the wall, still think he's stronger?"

"Eh.. maybe we should help.." Hidan said, running a hand through his hair.

"Maybe *you* should help, I'll join you when Asuma gets here, I'm not leaving Neji alone until I know he's in safe hands."

"Let blondie take your boytoy to the hospital."

"Hell no." Shikamaru said, then gave Hidan a shove with his free hand. "Go!"

"KATON!"

Hidan let out another swear and darted out the hole, scythe in hand, as the night was lit by the unmistakable glow of fire. And Shikamaru mentally kicked himself after realizing the only thing he could think clearly right now was how he hoped Asuma would get here so he could see Hidan fight. He tried to block out the noise as he stroked Neji's once silky hair, now reduced to a tangle of chopped up bits and peices and singed ends. He listened to Neji's half-concious, sobbing curses and took them, not letting himself feel the pain. He would make himself feel it later, he deserved it after all, but right now the best thing to do was stay focused.

Finally, finally after what was surely only a few moments but felt like years, Asuma burst through the door, and Shikamaru again kicked himself to noting that the first thing he noticed about the man was the lack of a cigarette.

"What the hell is going on out there Nara! What in God's name have you gotten yourself into now?!"

Shikamaru ignored his inquirires and pulled Neji up with him to his feet, the brunette cried out but didn't resist. "Get him to a hospital, I have to go help."

"You don't have to do shit, you let those two deal with each other." Asuma said, gingerly taking Neji's arm and crouching to put it over his shoulder.

"*I have to!*"

"None of this would have even happened if you had just asked for help instead of trying to do it all by yourself" Asuma said, but Shikamaru had already whirled around and was racing toward the hole in the wall, the clashing of metal and Hidan's shouting echoing in after he'd gone. Asuma sighed and turned slowly toward the door, sighing and informing Neji of how hard-headed his lover was.

---

Outside, the battle raged on, in the few moments Shikamaru hadn't witnessed, Itachi had activated his sharingan and the mangekyo symbol glowed in his eyes against the dark. Hidan had lost a portion of his shirt and was dancing in circles around the younger Uchiha who was somehow managing to hold off both Hidan and his older brother.

Shikamaru couldn't help but think that Hidan was doing no more than attempting to be a distraction, his sadistic grin wasn't imposed on his features, only a serious frown. But, then again, he was probably doing as little as he could, as well as trying not to hurt Itachi's last remaining family. Shikamaru was no moron, and he knew damn well that Hidan not only feared but respected the older Uchiha..

"Damn it all.." Shikamaru swore when he realized that clouds had come to settle over the sky, seemingly attracted by the rapidly changing temperatures due to the giant fireballs both Uchihases continued to spit out every so often. He couldn't use his jutsu, he might as well just be a distraction himself. He gasped when a chakra enhanced punch sent Hidan spiraling backward into the big oak tree in the albino's yard. The crunch as well as the vibration of the tree almost made the Nara gag. There was no way that hadn't killed him, which meant it was back to one on one between brothers, who were exchanging blows in a blurr of motion before leaping back and charging again.

Shikamaru clenched his fist as another fireball was sent bulldozing toward Itachi, who managed to leap out of the way and send a pack of 6 flaming shuriken which seemed to just materialize from nowhere hurdling back at Sasuke. He felt so useless, but if he intervened now he'd be nothing but a distraction to Itachi. Sasuke doubtedly cared whether he was caught in the crossfire or not.

The lightning sword popped and fizzled loudly as it went cleanly through Itachi's gut, and Shikamaru's stomach rolled before Itachi disappeared in a flock of ravens, leaving a log in its place. Itachi materialized behind Sasuke and managed to give him a sharp jab with his elbow before the younger was ducking and swinging out a



leg that caught Itachi's ankle. Itachi caught himself mid-fall and kicked upward, hitting Sasuke under the chin and flipping him backward after a brief spurt of blood from his mouth. Hidan whooped at this and dove in, narrowly missing Sasuke's throat in what Shikamaru honestly thought was an intentional miss. Though He was glad for it, seeing anyone be decapitated right now would probably make him lose what bit of sanity he had left.

*Why the hell has no one seen this and reported it by now?*

Shikamaru thought, there should be fucking tanks and army men out here by now with the utter destruction the two were causing. He had a mind to pull out his phone, it wasn't as if he were doing anything other than standing there anyway, and noted the time.

2:05 a.m.

Shikamaru's head buzzed, that couldn't be right, Hidan had come to get him at midnight, the trek out there to the clearing had taken an hour and a half, the battle between himself and Deidara (*speaking of which, where the FUCK was he?*) had only lasted ten minutes, and the flight back here had taken maybe another ten, maybe fifteen at the most. That meant that this fight had only been going on for.. just over ten minutes. And it had escalated that quickly.

Sasuke grunted at the effort as he jabbed at his brother with lightning-laced hands, still bleeding steadily from the mouth. Shikamaru almost slapped himself to rid the image of Sasuke Uchiha missing his two front teeth.

"Sasuke." Itachi somehow managed to shout in a calm demeanor. He was ignored, and after blocking a few more punches and evading another fireball, he slipped behind Sasuke and caught him in a choke hold.

"What is there to gain from this?"

"Let go of me you BASTARD!" Sasuke screeched, retracting his elbow with the distinct glow of chakra and ramming it back into the

older's gut. Itachi was sent rolling, having been caught offguard, but was quickly on his feet again.

"Don't try to give me any of that wise older brother shit! You don't know ANYTHING ABOUT ME!" Sasuke cried, throwing a ball of crackling electricity rocketing toward his evaded easily, and Shikamaru shifted on his feet, this was quickly turning into some sort of family argument. Had everyone forgotten all the other crap going on around here?

Itachi was silent as he continued attacking and evading, Shika remained silent standing away from it all. This as going to go on forever if he couldn't figure something out. But, he didn't have to. Hidan's snarl rang out, somehow managing to pass the struggles of the two Uchiha enough to make both men glance backward. "That fucking HURT!" Lethal intent was plastered all over his body as Hidan pulled himself from the tree. Shikamaru took a step back, that hadn't killed him? But he hadn't moved for a bit, maybe it just knocked him unconscious.

"I'M GONNA FUCKING KILL YOU FOR THAT!" He roared, jetting forward with speed that made Shikamaru's jaw drop.

"Hidan!" Itachi shouted, blocking an assault from Sasuke and leaping back a few feet.

It made no difference though, the Jashinist was on the younger of the two in a heartbeat, leaping up as Sasuke charged at him and lunged as well, swinging his scythe wildly and so fast that as Sasuke used his sword to block it, the two almost seemed suspended in the air. The fact alone that Sasuke was managing to deflect every strike spoke volumes, and the Nara watched in awe. This, this could turn out to be bad, he'd wanted so badly to see Hidan's physical abilities, and now that he did it seemed a weight had settled in his stomach.

Could Shikamaru compete with that? He didn't know, he didn't know if he could react quick enough should Hidan ever come at him with that kind of fury and the intent to kill. Good god, He really *had* been

messing around when he'd attacked him before, and yet he seemed impressed with Shikamaru?

He shook the thought from his head, watching Hidan fight, shivering at the ferocity. He needed to stop, he decided. He needed to stop forcing so much thought into situations where he should just be trusting his gut. Situations where he should be trusting his partner...

Finally they hit the ground and they both bounced around in an eloquent dance as they attacked and evaded over and over, Hidan's howls and snarls echoing through the air. Itachi jumped in at the last moment just as it seemed Sasuke was suffering exhaustion, he *had* been fighting longer than they had.

The older Uchiha poofed himself in front of Hidan just as the man managed to nick his opponents shoulder, the gleam of blood on the tip of his uppermost blade unrealistically bright. And to Shikamaru's confusion Itachi swung at Hidan, who dodged it easily with one of those giant backward leaps he so envied.

"Don't you dare!" Itachi growled, following him with a Kunai drawn. Hidan smiled a sick sadistic smile that Shikamaru hadn't seen on him yet, and his stomach lurching as Hidan licked the blood from the end of the blade, bursting out into a maniacal laugh.

"STOP!" Itachi roared, delivering a booted heel to the side of Hidan's face. The albino went skidding away, but stayed on his feet, and he tossed the scythe away. Shikamaru's eyes followed it as it fell into the barren soil that made up Hidan's backyard, and his eyes flicked back to meet Hidan's. He sucked in a gasp at the reckless abandon in them, that was the look of someone who was about to take a life, and enjoy it. Jashinist indeed, Shikamaru thought. There's no way Hidan was anything less than a high priest, not with the things he now realized he was capable of...

*But what the hell is he going to do without his scythe?*

"Hidan, please.." Itachi pleaded, his calm voice creaking at just the last second. The spikey haired man's chest felt heavy at that small admittance of emotion, and he turned away, this was too much to take in, he couldn't do it. Neji hated him, Sasuke was running around killing people, Itachi was showing emotion, begging Hidan to stop whatever assuming terrible thing he was about to do, and Hidan... Hidan was more psycho than usual. This was all too much, and he closed his eyes, opening them as a slight movement caught his eye. Sasuke had been standing all the way over in the opposite yard, watching Hidan carefully. And now that Itachi seemed to have managed to calm the Jashinist down, he was fleeing.

Shikamaru watched him go, he couldn't go after him, as much as he wanted to, he would get creamed if he did, he realized with a depressing thought. He was out of his league, had been since this whole fiasco started. The Akatsuki could deal with him, Itachi specifically. Hidan wasn't the murderer, and it was no longer his concern, even if it was, he wanted nothing more to do with it, he'd taken enough risks. He let his eyes wander over the complete and utter destruction of his house and yard. There was nothing left, just the shell of what was once his home, and he swallowed hard. How had this gone so horribly wrong? He'd had everything under control, he'd known what he was doing...

They had tried to warn him, Neji, Asuma, even Itachi...

*"You are nieve, and you should be embarassed for it."*

*"All the bits and peices that you're paying attention to, they're the opposite of what you should be concerning yourself with."*

He listenened to the calm voices behind him, eyes closed. It just didn't make sense, it still didn't make sense. *It was Sasuke?* He'd never even fit into the equasion. Why? Why would he? After everything Hidan told him Itachi went through..

Itachi was quietly lecturing Hidan about Sasuke being no one's responsibility but his own, and if Hidan ever tried what he'd just done

again he'd kill him. Hidan snapped out some vulgar response, and Itachi growled right back.

Shikamaru forced himself not to listen, He didn't want to know what Hidan had almost done. And he realized with sudden clarity that he had been seriously underestimating the albino, sure, he'd been cautious because he didn't know what the man was capable of, but he'd honestly never expected this.

Had he gotten so used to these small town crimes that the possibility of something so violent actually happening had seemed unrealistic? So much so that he'd ruled it out completely...

That seemed possible, in fact, he knew that's what it was.

Oh well if his house was destroyed, all the more reason to get the hell away from here, he didn't ever want to see this place again, he didn't ever want to see this house again, and he didn't ever want to see Hidan or the Akatsuki again.

It was all just too damn troublesome.

---

A/N- WAIT! Before you start screaming, it's not the end, There's more, aboutt, two more chapters more I do beleive, maybe more, but probably not, and an epilogue as well. So don't come hunting me down yet.

Heh, That chapter.. was so. fucking. hard.

But it was sooo fun. Oh snap. I'm not going to re-read through this before I post, and I'm sure there's a ton of typos, but just do the best you can okay? I'm frikin mentally pooped right now, this story writing stuff is hard frikin work.

Also, I want to give a shoutout to Intrigued for the super long but really awesome review they left! I wish you weren't on a guest account so I could have messaged you back to thank you, it made

me feel so damn good and... and... just thank you. I hope I don't dissapoint. :(

Anyways, so yea, here's that action packed chapter, thanks for reading, thanks for everyone following, and REVIEW!

EDIT; Went back through and fixed as many of the errors as I could catch, added some things too. I still don't know if I'm satisfied with this chapter, tell me what you think, were the fight scenes too short? Did I explain well enough? If everything peicing together? Are there loose ends that still don't make sense. TELL ME THESE THINGS PEOPLE I NEED TO KNOW!

# Chapter 11

## Bad Neighbors

---

The hospital smelled like antiseptic. Antiseptic and blood.

He didn't want to be here, honestly he didn't want to be anywhere right now, He wanted to disappear, to just suddenly be gone from existence. He couldn't bear to see the horrible aftermath of his blunder, he didn't want to look at today's paper, sitting over on the windowsill where the nurse had left it after he'd requested something for him to pass the time.

He knew his name was plastered all over the front page. His face, his home, where he worked... Everyone knew now. The entire town, all of his friends and family. What did they think of him?

He didn't want to know.

He was deep in the throes of depression and self-pity. He was trying so desperately to get out, he had no right, not with Neji laying there in the hospital bed, bandages over his eyes, his arm in a sling after they'd popped his shoulder back into place, gauze and band-aids pasted all over his skin like stickers... No, he had no right. He had failed him so utterly, and he sucked in a breath at the pain in his chest, the realization that Neji would probably leave, and Shikamaru would never see him again.

This couldn't really be happening. It had all been going so perfectly as planned.

He leaned forward, resting his head down onto his crossed forearms beside Neji's thigh. He had to get out of this, he had to get his mind going again, he didn't want to, *God* he didn't want to. He wanted to wash his hands of it, but just backing out now would do nothing.

Everything would be wasted and he would be stuck with that guilt and self-hatred while he tried to rebuild his life.

*"You have no idea how much shit you're in Nara." Asuma had said over the phone. "I don't know how, but my men survived, luckily for you. They had families Shikamaru, wives and children."*

There was at least that small comfort, that small, confusing, infuriating comfort, but it was there. Those men were on the police force, they risked their lives everyday, and suddenly it was his fault that they'd come so terribly close to death? Apparently not seeing their vital signs had been an illusion cast on Neji, Sasuke's sharingan working even through Neji's byakugan.. The only think Shikamaru didn't understand was why he only used those eyes to cause fear, and not to trap him in some illusion like a rat while he...

Shikamaru's eyes snapped open, he didn't want to think about anyone dyeing, all that mattered was that everyone was still alive... everyone.

He shifted to look up at his lover, sleeping deeply now thanks to a heavy dose of pain medication. He was at a loss now, Sasuke had gotten away, what if he came back? Surely the thought of Itachi interfearing again wouldn't keep him away, hell, he'd gotten damn close to killing his older brother several times.

He stretched out an arm to smooth Neji's hair, now trimmed down into a long bob. The first thing the Hyuga had done upon waking up in the hospital is demand a hair stylist 'come fix his goods'. Something that probably would have been funny had he not blatantly ignored Shikamaru's presence, acting not only as if the man wasn't there, but as if he'd never existed in the first place. Shikamaru sighed, pushing the thought from his mind, instead focusing on the new haircut. Damn the man looked weird with short hair... At least now he wouldn't have to quarrel with himself about whether he'd like it shorter or not.



His face hardened as he retracted his hand, running through his own hair which was out of its usual ponytail. He had to see this through, Neji may hate him, Asuma may try to force him off it by firing him, (which he was honestly surprised he hadn't done already) but he couldn't leave Sasuke out there running loose. Not only were there innumerable more lives at stake, but Neji would never be able to recover emotionally knowing that at any moment the younger Uchiha might return to finish the job.

He pinched the bridge of his nose, shifting it into an eye rub. He was tired again, two whole nights in a row now he hadn't gotten any sleep, having been challenged by the blonde man-woman terrorist, watching the whole battle between Sasuke, Itachi, and Hidan, and then staying with Neji in the hospital on these horribly uncomfortable and ungodly ugly orange plastic chairs. He had a sneaking suspicion that they had cots or recliners or other means for worried family members to get some sleep, but Neji had told the staff not to let Shikamaru have any.

He sighed, smiling ever-so-faintly. At least he knew Neji was intact enough to still hold his grudges and throw his hissy-fits.

"Go away Shikamaru." Neji's voice croaked. Shikamaru's attention snapped to his lover, feeling a small zing of pain when he couldn't look into his eyes, only an off-white bandage. He didn't say anything, and Neji didn't move. What could he say? That he was sorry he'd almost gotten him killed? Sorry he'd completely betrayed his trust? Sorry he had to get his hair cut because the little brother of the friend of the psycho next door had tried to murder him?

The hair really was important. Judge as you will, but Shikamaru knew it was.

"I don't know what to think of you right now. Leave me alone until I do." Neji lifted his hand and laid it across his stomach when Shikamaru attempted to hold it.

He swallowed hard, The brunette didn't really sound mad, like he had earlier. But, of course he didn't, Neji wasn't an idiot who went around covering his emotions with a wall of anger. He was a genius, as they say, and he wasn't angry, he was hurt. He was trying to overcome the feelings that arose when fighting for your life, the irrational ones, and trying to figure out what he was going to do now, whether he would forgive Shikamaru or walk away.

"I... I can't leave you alone Neji." Shikamaru said, his throat hurting with the effort of holding back his own depression.

"You had no problem doing it before."

Okay.. maybe he was still a little mad.

"Please Neji. I know. I know how bad I screwed up, I'll explain everything to you. I'll tell you everything I had planned, every thought that went through my head. I really.. I didn't think... How could I have ever known it was Sasuke?"

Neji remained quiet, and Shikamaru went on, knowing he should just shut up and do what his lover was asking.

"I thought it was Hidan, Neji. I really did, He's in this insane cult disguised as a religion, he's in that criminal club, I thought It was him, and I thought they were covering it up, all of them in on it. I left that night to try to get them to let me in so I could have undeniable proof..."

"I know."

"There was no way I could have known! I mean, Hidan was with me the entire time and.. Wait, did you say you knew?"

Neji nodded, wincing at the small motion. Shikamaru's mouth was still open and prepared to say something, but he couldn't.

"I knew you thought it was him, why else would you put so much effort into trying to make someone you didn't like think you liked them?"

Shikamaru kept quiet, not feeling like telling Neji that he actually had grown a bit fond of the insane albino, and that it was just Neji's extreme hatred that made him assume he hated him as well.

"But you know, like you said, he's smarter than he was letting on. I'm not blind Shika, he was doing the same to you. He wants me, Shika, he was using you to get to me. It's obvious now that it wasn't so that he could kill me, but he still... *wants* me.." Neji stiffened through a shudder at the last. "I thought it would be obvious to you, and plus I didn't want to say it out loud. Seeing as he was *always* around." Neji's tone was shifting to angry again, and Shika's mind was too busy mulling over this to try to calm him down before he got worked up.

"You two were so far up each others asses trying to prove to each other that you liked one another that you left me alone."

"Neji, I already told you.."

"I don't mean physically, Shika. You were never around, your mind was always on him. Why do you think I hated him so much? Yeah, at first I was pissed because he's an idiot, but it only got worse when this whole ordeal started. "

So much of what Neji was saying didn't make sense. And Shikamaru had the feeling maybe the brunette had just now figured this out too, there were so many holes in what he was saying. Shikamaru sighed, Neji was trying to make sense out of it too...

"Regardless.." Shikamaru said, he didn't want to talk about this. Not now, not ever. It did no good to try to outwit Neji, even when the man was wrong and he knew it, he would never back down. He reached up and brushed few strands of hair off of his bandage, where his eyes should have been, Neji didn't stop him. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry

this happened. I know.." He swallowed hard, forcing himself to say what needed said. "I know this is probably going to piss you off even more, but I'm not letting it go."

"Good." Neji said, shocking the hell out of him. "I'd be more pissed if you didn't. That fucking shithead tried to kill me Shika! I'd rip your balls off, bronze them, and put them in my trophy shelf if you let that fucker get away with that!"

Shikamaru almost choked. Somehow they'd completely skipped the whole fight, they'd skipped over the blame and shame game, there was no yelling, very little explanation, and they were on the same page. It was a miracle.

"I don't like *him*, and I don't like his *friends*, but at least you know that you're all on the same side. You're going to need them."

Shikamaru stared, he could almost feel the gears in his own head begin to turn, rusty and creaking as though he'd shut down years ago.

Suddenly he stood up, pushing the chair back to cause a horrible screech that made Neji jerk and then whimper from the movement. Everything snapped into place, the puzzle was completed, as if he'd only been missing the one piece all along, and he'd found it hidden under the table.

"I need to call Asuma." He said blandly, pulling out his phone almost mechanically.

"You do that." Neji said, and then rolled his head over in his partner's direction, the corners of his lips curling. "And for fuck's sake Shikamaru Nara, *tell me what you're planning.* "

He smiled back as the phone rang, leaning over Neji and using his free hand to gently cup the side of his face.

"Stop swearing, love. It doesn't suit you."

---

"Stay with him Hidan."

"Yeah."

"I mean it! Don't leave this room!"

"For Jashin's fucking-Shut up will ya? I fucking understand I speak the same damn language as you!"

"I mean it. You're going to be sorry if you leave this room. I trusting you as my friend."

Shikamaru pointed his finger accusingly at Hidan as he spoke, using the commanding tone that miraculously seemed to make everyone around him listen. Hidan hesitated, glaring sideways at him, almost as if he were suddenly suspicious. A red flag went up in Shikamaru's head, but he didn't let it show. If there was a God, he would let this plan actually work out. His luck couldn't be so bad, rarely, and he meant *rarely* did a plan ever go wrong. That last one had gone badley enough to make up for a few years worth of miscalculations, this had to be right, it had to be. He had shoved his 'poor me' phase away, and used the anger to fuel his determination and overpower the lack of sleep.

Someone was going to feel pain today.

"Okay, Bud-dy." Hidan drawled, "I got this. No one's going to touch a pretty little hair on his head. Go fucking play with your new best friends."

"God, Hidan. Get over it will you? We're after Sasuke, Itachi *has* to be a part of it."

"If you're going to use anyone's name in vain at least make it a worthwhile deity. I still think you'd make a damn fine Jashinist, pineapple head." There it was, there was that damn grin. Shikamaru hadn't seen it in awhile, and it was a good sign. Shikamaru looked to

Neji, carefully munching on a peice of toast, he hadn't trusted Hidan not to tamper with his food, and so would only get what Shikamaru could bring from what was left of their house.

"You sure you're okay?" Shikamaru said, wishing desperatley he could just look into his eyes again. *Please let this go smoothly.*

Neji nodded, barely managing to hide a grimace. "I trust you, Shikamaru. "

The hidden meaning and emotion behind those words nearly broke his resolve, but he shook it off. It would work, it had to work. He wouldn't let him down again.

"I'll see you soon." He almost whispered, and with one last questioning glance at Hidan, who only rolled his eyes, he left the room, letting the door click behind him before he took off in a run. The hospital staff protested, but he wasn't certian how much time he had, and there was none to waste by walking when he was fully able to move faster.

Itachi was waiting outside the door, or rather, the apparition of Itachi, given the lack of a lower torso. He only stared at Shikamaru, expression unreadable as the Nara approached.

"Care to explain? I have things to attend to and I don't see any emergency here."

Shikamaru gave a false chuckle in response. "You probably already know."

The Itachi ghost stared for a heartbeat, and blinked slowly. "Hn. This is the location we're at. I'll see you there."

"You came prepared and yet you're still trying to pretend you don't know?"

"I'm glad you finally caught on. He's nothing but trouble."

"Agreed."

The illusion faded, and Shikamaru was left with the small slip of paper with nothing but an address. The location was halfway across town from here, Damn, this was stretching it thin.

He pushed the doubt away and shoved the paper in his pocket, power-walking to his car. This was going to work. It had become a mantra in his head, and he found himself chanting it under his breath and he got in and turned the key, slammed it into reverse and punched the gas. A few passersby stopped and complained about the squealing of tires as he raced out of the parking lot, taking the stop sign with nothing more than a tap of the brakes.

---

"An old abandoned warehouse." Shikamaru mumbled as he skidded to a stop and ripped the keys from the ignition. "Can't ever go wrong with the classics..." He jumped out of the vehicle, not even bothering to close the door, and glanced at his watch as he jogged past the boarded and chained front doors around the side of the building. All the doors would be locked tight, he knew without checking. Most likely sealed with chakra if this was where the Akatsuki did most of their business, not even a bomb would open them.

A raven was sitting on the barbwire fence up ahead, its eyes blazing an unrealistic red. Shikamaru would have sworn it even nodded at him as he came up on it.

The bird stretched its wings and flapped a couple times, cawing, and took off like a bullet, heading straight for the wall of the building. Without thinking Shikamaru raised a hand and shouted, then stopped in his tracks and nearly choked then the bird vanished behind the wall.

"Oh."

He mentally kicked himself and rushed to the brick, gently placing his hand on it only for it to go right through it. Some kind of illusion

Jutsu, he didn't even want to know who in the organization was capable of it. He took a deep breath before stepping through, and for a second could seem to understand why his eyes wouldn't open. He reached up to his face to feel it before realizing that it wasn't his eyes, it was just pitch black in here.

"Draag." He muttered, pulling out his cellphone to use as a flashlight only for it not to work. Confused, he dialed a few buttons, hearing the beeps. The phone was on, why wasn't it lighting up.

*"Security measures."* A voice creaked from the darkness. Shikamaru had to cover his mouth not to swear. Good God it was the most bone chilling sound he'd ever heard, and he suddenly felt like he was in a damn horror film.

*"Apologies, for the scare.."* Two glowing yellow orbs popped into view a few feet directly in front of him, and he stiffened. Eyes, those were eyes. Oh dear fucking Christ it was the plant guy, also known as Hidan's drug supplier.

**"Mmm, yes. Even night vision goggles won't work here. The best of the best couldn't sneak up on us, they usually make it this far before I gobble them up."**

Shikamaru's stomach did a somersault as the second voice spoke up, and he shut his eyes, though it didn't do much good. This place would make a killing as a haunted house.

"Ah, is there two of you or..." Shikamaru's words went unheard, and just as well, he didn't like the way his voice sounded right now. As if he was going through puberty all over again.

*"Hushhh, you're going to frighten him. Remember? This one is an ally."*

**"Oh yes, yes. Sorry. Mm, would you mind extending your arm?"**



*"Light doesn't come in here, it's easier to guide you. Unless you'd just like to follow our voice?"*

Shit, what the hell was this guy. Zetsu, was it? There's no kind of jutsu in the world that would make a person split down the middle like that and have two complete different personalities and voices and thought processes on each side... He couldn't possibly be real.

Nonetheless, Shikamaru hesitantly reached out. The last thing he wanted was for whatever the hell this guy was to touch him, but damn it all, he did *not* want to have to go towards those fucking creepy-ass voices.

*" Thank you."*

**" Cooperation makes everything easier. You've no idea."**

"Yeah.." Shikamaru said, clearing his throat. "Can you just... let's hurry, I'm on a tight schedule."

**" Mm, very well."**

*" They never want to chat..."*

Shikamaru was then yanked forward, and struggled to get himself back into balance as he was pulled ahead quickly, and he stumbled again when he was yanked sharply to the right. The process continued for a few moments more, with Shikamaru letting out small growls and huffs in an attempt to make the plant man stop tugging him around like a toy. He was about to lose his temper when he was suddenly blinded and swore as he closed his eyes and threw his arm over them.

He opened them just barely and turned to see that Zetsu was already gone and there was nothing behind him but a brick wall. He nudged a foot against it, or would have if it had come in contact with anything solid. The tip of his shoe disappeared just like his hand had previously.

What the hell were the Akatsuki up to that required this type of security?

"Look who the freak dragged in Yeah?"

Shikamaru whirled to the familiar voice, letting his arm down now that his eyes had adjusted better, though he still had to squint. His body tensed as he found himself staring into the bright blue eyes( or eye, since one was hidden behind that freakishly blonde hair) of Deidara, who was standing uncomfortably close. He grinned, resembling Hidan in the devious action of it but not resembling him at all with the empty promise it held.

"Heh, The moron is right, you're a jumpy little shit. Hm. "

Shikamaru sidestepped him and continued on. "Just hurry up and take me where I'm supposed to go, *yeah?*" Shikamaru mocked, and Deidara growled behind him, though following.

"Hey don't think you're better than me, I was holding back, I wouldn't killed you in a second if I hadn't been ordered not to, hn. The thing with art is if you hold back, there's nothing left."

"Uh huh. That's great. Am I going the right way?"

"Will you pay some fucking respect here? I could just bean unconcious and all your precious little plans would be ruined yeah?" Deidara stepped up his pace and edged in front of Shikamaru. "I don't like you either. But I'm not hard to get along with as long as you don't treat me like a turd."

"A turd?"

"Yeah! Okay? A freeking turd? It's another word for shit!"

"A word that only 4-year-olds use."

"Oh my fucking-Agh you're more of a smartass than Hidan! Just shut up yeah? If you make me lose my temper and blow this place up,

that's on you. Hn."

Shikamaru rolled his eyes as they turned a corner and Deidara unlocked a door and pulled it open, holding it and making the 'ladies first' gesture with the not-quite-Hidan grin. They really needed to make him dye his hair, blonde with bright blue eyes was as threatening as a chihuahua.

He did take note of Deidara's words. He wanted to get along? Which meant he thought they would be seeing each other after this. Did that mean they wanted to make him a member?

Not a chance. He decided. After this he was moving as far away as he could get. Why not? It's not like he had a house or any investments, surely he could transfer to some other town with his job. The only concern was whether 'destroyed by serial killing ninja' was covered by his insurance.

He stepped into the room and his gaze was instantly drawn to Itachi, who nodded in greeting. Shikamaru returned the gesture and continued into the room, Deidara following suit after the door banged shut.

"Finally, can we get on with this then?" The deep voice sent Shikamaru's attention to the wall behind Itachi, where a tall muscular man leaned against the brick with his arms crossed over his chest. Shikamaru blinked a few times, unable to disguise his stare.

Was he blue?

The man smiled at him, and Shika couldn't tell if it was one of those threatening smirks or an actual smile, on account of the shark teeth that lined his mouth. Even his eyes were small and completely black, no iris, no sclera, just black.

Did these people just go around trying to find the weirdest looking fucking people or what?

"Er.. yeah. Let's get going."

"Good. Bring'im in pinnocchio!" The blue man bellowed, and Shikamaru looked at Itachi, brow raised.

"Kisame, my partner."

Shikamaru grunted in understanding, even though he wasn't quite sure in which terms Itachi meant 'partner' by. Surely just business partner. Hidan and Kakuzu were a strange enough pair, there was no way Itachi was... no. He shook the thought from his mind, then mentally kicked himself for even thinking about it. There were more important things going on here.

A door opened that he could swear hadn't previously been there, and he took a deep breath when Sasuke walked in stiffly, followed by the shorter red-head he'd seen coming and going from Hidan's a few times. The redhead had his hands up and his fingers twitching as Sasuke walked before him, his jaw clenched and death-glaring everyone in the room. It wasn't until they came to a standstill that Shikamaru noticed the almost invisible little threads that started from the red-heads fingertips and strung along to random parts of Sasuke.

Christ, they were playing him like a puppet.

"Sasuke." Itachi stated, emotionless. His younger brother only glared.

"Explain."

"Shove it. You can't keep me."

"No, I have no intent. That's why he's here." Itachi gestured to Shikamaru. "He's going to arrest you."

Shikamaru had been standing with his hands behind his back, and nearly jumped when he suddenly felt something cold and metal slapped into them. He turned his head ever so slightly, aware of

Sasuke's eyes on him now. Deidara was weirdly close to him again, and leaned in even further.

"Handcuffs." he whispered, his lips barely moving and his eyes glaring daggers at Sasuke. "They'll drain his chakra to where he only has enough to keep him alive, hm."

Shikamaru swallowed as Deidara stepped away, And itachi continued as if nothing had happened, though everyone in the room was ompletley aware of the exchange that just happened. If blondie was trying to be descreet, he'd failed miserably.

"I'd really like to hear your reasoning though, before he does that."

"Tch, like you give a damn."

"Sasuke." This time his voice was sharp with irritation. "You killed innocent people, people no older than you. After the things I did to give you a life worth having.."

"Fuck off." Sasuke spat, attempting to shift but unable to due to the puppeteer behind him holding him with unflinching concentration. Shikamaru wondered why the hell they didn't just use these cuffs on him, but reasoned it out to just be some sort of humiliation sceme. Sasuke continued, his stare leaving Itachi to rest on the wall. "I didn't kill anyone. Let me go already, I don't fucking care about any brotherly lecture you have. I'm gonna get away anyway."

"You didn't kill anyone?" Itachi said flatly, quite obviously not beleiving him.

Sasuke's eyes met his again, widening just a bit as if he were trying to activate his sharingan but couldn't. "No. I didn't."

"What the hell were you trying to do to Neji then?" Shikamaru said surprised by how calm his voice came out.

" the hell are you?"

"Sasuke." Itachi interrupted just as Shikamaru was opening his mouth. "Why were you attacking Neji Hyuga?"

Sasuke remained silent, and Shikamaru could almost see the smoke rising from the holes he was glaring into his older brother.

"C'mon kid just freeking answer. You're not going anywhere until you do, make it easier for all of us." Kisame said, rubbing the back of his neck.

"You can suck it Shark-dick."

Kisame responded by clacking his teeth, managing to grin at the same time.

"Please, Sasuke. I want to beleive you, but I can't until you give me reason." Itachi stated, letting his sad frustration show the slightest bit. His brother stared at him, considering his and Kisame's words most likely, and then sighed angrily.

"I was paid to scare him, beat him within an inch of his life."

Shikamaru nodded, unnoticed.

"But not to kill him. I don't kill, I just come close, make them think they're going to die."

"Who is paying you?"

"Like I'd fucking tell you that. Then I won't get my money."

Itachi squinted in unhidden anger. "You're whoreing your skills now?"

"I'm getting paid to do what I'm good at!" Sasuke snapped back.

"Who's paying you?"

"I'm not going to tell you. You might as well let me go." He said matter-of-factly, and just smiled at the elder Uchiha as he glared.

"Not gonna happen."

"You have grown up.." Itachi said through clenched teeth, his eyes closed now. "To be true to your last name. Sasuke. You're doing cruel things to people who don't deserve it, for money. I thought I'd spared you that."

"Oh wahh. You were in jail, I grew up in the real world. I didn't even know who you were until I was 14. Don't act like you raised me. "

"And jail is where you're going now." Itachi said, whirling and stepping quickly to the door Shikamaru had entered from. He looked around the room at everyone, and held up a finger before turning to follow after Itachi. But the sharingan user was waiting just on the other side of the door.

"Is your Boss here yet?" He asked quickly, his voice back to it's normal unreadable nature.

"Yes. Ah.. do you have a faster way out of here? I really don't want to have to drag your brother through that... security system..."  
Shikamaru shivered at the goosebumps the memory brought.

"Use the front doors, we won't be using this building again now that it's known. Kisame has unblocked them. Nagato is going to have the whole thing collapse after we've cleared out, so I suggest you tell them to get him in the car and get going."

"Good. I'll meet you at my house, you sure you know where he'd go?"

Itachi nodded, and turned to walk away. Shikamaru watched him for a few seconds, concluding that Nagato must be another member, possibly the leader. He didn't think Itachi was the founder of the Akatsuki, but he could always be wrong. It wasn't important enough to dwell on, and so he turned on his heel and returned to the room, Kisame and Deidara were gone, leaving only the red-head and Sasuke, whose eyes were suddenly a bit glazed over.

"I gave him a little sedative. " The puppeteer stated, looking almost bored. "Even with the cuffs, he'd give you trouble, the brat. " The man waited while Shikamaru brisked over and slapped the metal around the younger Uchiha's wrists, he'd already had Sasuke's arms behind his back, making the whole process easier.

"Thank you.. erm.."

"You're welcome." He said, either not getting the hint that Shikamaru didn't know his name or ignoring it as his chakra strings retracted from Sasuke back up into his fingers. "Follow me."

The shortish redhead turned and went through the door he'd entered from while Shikamaru struggled getting an incoherent Sasuke successfully to his feet and dragging him along after him. Shikamaru didn't bother with small talk as he made the longer-than-he-would-like trek to the front of the warehouse, the club had built all kinds of rooms and what looked like jail cells almost into the building, and the thought briefly crossed his mind that they probably weren't all that happy about having to destroy this building and all the work they'd put into it to find a new one and start all over again.

But, that was the price to you to be a secret organization that wants the world to think it's evil.

---

A/N- Blah. It's two in the morning, but I absolutely had to get this chapter done. Or so I told myself. . Seeing as it's been a few weeks since I've posted.

Blarg, almost done, guys, I know you're probably a little bummed about it, but I'm a little bit relieved. I wanted to let you know that after the story is complete, I'm going to be going back through and fixing a lot of holes and typos and all that kind of crap that I've noticed, and I'm sure that I'll be adding and taking away as I go. So, ya know, whenever I get the story done, you might come back after a month or so and reread it, it'll probably be different, maybe not anything huge and significant, but a few random details here and there.



Anyway, thanks for sticking with me, hope this chapter wasn't too confusing, if you'd like you can try to guess what's going on, though at this point it's probably not hard. xD

Anyway, REVIEW!

# Chapter 12

## Bad Neighbors

A/N- Okay, so. I know it's been forever, and I'm sorry. Had a lot of random things pop up that kept me from being able to have the peace and quiet I need to write, one of which was my son's first birthday. And it didnt help that when my parents came down for the party, my dad went though my computer and deleted stuff to make it run faster, one of the things he did was empty the recycle bin, which is where I hide the folder I keep all my stuff in...

I already had half this chapter written out, and of course this just obliterated any muse that I had. BUT! because I love you, and because **fluffyisemo** won't get off my ass, I'm going to push through the writer's block and continue.

So. Without further adeiu.. The last chapter.

---

Sasuke fell heavily onto Asuma, muttering something about this being a waste of time and something that sounded like, "Don't hate me brother..." His head rolled around on his shoulders as he tried to stand upright, failing miserably and collapsing onto the older man.

Asuma looked to Shikamaru, the confusion on his face asking the question for him. Shikamaru only regarded Sasuke with a mixture of pity and irritation.

"Leave the cuffs on him, they keep him from using jutsu. He's been sedated but it'll wear off eventually."

"Juz cause you're scurred ov'me." Sasuke drawled.

"You're damn right I am." Shikamaru replied softly, hunching slightly to let his eyes meet Sasuke's glazed ones. "But I'm more scared of

your big brother, You should be too. You should just stay in your cell, you'd be safer."

"D'n tell me howda liff my life." The young Uchiha breathed just before his legs turned to jello. Asuma grunted at the sudden weight shift, trying to keep them both upright, and ungracefully let him flop into the car as Shika opened the door for him. The two worked together to get him scooted far enough to the other side to tuck his legs in and shut the door.

"Damn," Asuma said after they'd succeeded, lighting up a cigarette. "He was never such a bad kid..."

"He didn't do it."

"What?" Asuma's brow arched as he exhaled the smoke into Shikamaru's face. He didn't wave it away to his surprise, and actually took a slow breath in.

"I'll explain it to you later."

"I saw for myself what he did to Neji."

Shikamaru sighed and pinched his nose. "Yeah, he did *that*, obviously. But he's not the one murdering people. He was a cover-up. Hired, I'm still not sure if him being caught was planned or not.. But i don't have time for this now. Has the locator gone off yet?"

"No. But I had someone trace it, it's still at the hospital."

"Damn." Shikamaru swore, almost wanting to ask Asuma for one of those cancer-sticks. He pushed the thought out, he didn't need to get started on that, it angered him that he even had the thought. Besides, he had more important things to set his mind on. "Have you sent anyone there?"

"No, Is Neji planning on being released?" Asuma's voice was getting uneasy now. The Nara, as usual, had asked for these favors and had

yet to explain anything, thought he continued to promise just that.

"Hidan stayed with him." Shikamaru said robotically, staring into Asuma's dark eyes, as if he could telepathically just transfer everything he'd figured out into his boss's mind. It somewhat worked, as the man's face became solemn and he pulled out his radio, ordering someone on the other end to go check on Hyuga.

"I have to go." Shikamaru whirled as Asuma pulled the walkie-talkie from his ear.

"Where do we need to meet you?"

"You don't. I have someone to help me, this is out of our league now. You just worry about him." Shikamaru waved to the police car as he strode quickly toward his own. Ignoring his second-father-figure's protests. He cracked his knuckles after he slammed the door shut and wrenched the key in the ignition.

This time he wasn't going to just stand there.

---

"You weren't aware of the cellar beneath your house?" Itachi questioned in an almost snarky tone. "I thought your boyfriend could see through everything."

"Yeah, well he can see through bullshit pretty well, but not 20 feet of solid earth." Shikamaru eyed him as he picked the lock on Hidan and Kakuzu's house. Why the hell he didn't just kick the door in was a question left unanswered. Itachi had said 'boyfriend' as if it were the most natural thing in the world, there wasn't a hint of unease or taunting in it, maybe he really was..

No god dammit, why the hell couldn't he stay focused?

The slight smile on Itachi's face made it hard for him to push the question from his mind as the lock clicked and the eldest Uchiha silently opened the door and brisked in.

"That's only an estimation. I don't know exactly how far down it is, but it would be far enough so that it couldn't be detected easily."

"How do you know this?" Shikamaru followed, feeling useless as Itachi moved quickly from room to room, ignoring the question. The Nara didn't know how to find a hidden door, it would take him hours to look through all the random, weird, and unsettling 'decorations' littering the psychotic couple's house.

Itachi growled almost inaudibly as the knob he'd just grabbed refused to turn, and he stepped back before whirling around and roughly kicking the door open. Shikamaru noted with a grimace that it was the door that had had the Jashin symbol on it, though it was now on the floor, still glinting at the light from the window.

The contents of the room surprised him though, or, perhaps the lack of. There was an immaculate looking entertainment type piece of dark redwood against the far wall, decorated with deep crimson candles and animal skulls and papers lined with what looked like some ancient language taped all about the back. On the floor was a heavily stained rug that took up half the room, (the rest being terribly unkept hardwood,) a Jashin circle took up the entirety of it in what he could only assume was thick chalk, and stubby red candles rested around the edges of the circle. The rest of the walls were bare, stained so heavily that Shikamaru couldn't really decide what color the walls had originally been, but bare. The rest of the room was no different.

Shikamaru couldn't seem to form the words on his tongue enough to ask what the hell went on in here, and truthfully he wasn't sure he even wanted to know.

"It has to be in here somewhere.." Itachi breathed, succeeding much more in hiding his emotions at the room than Shikamaru.

"Ah, should I go look for a basement door?"

"You've been in the house, you know they don't have a basement."

"How.."

"This is the only room without carpet, Kakuzu's biggest weakness is his inability to overlook spending more for better function. It's in here, help me roll the rug."

Shikamaru winced, he didn't want to touch that grimy thing.. "Don't you think that would be too obvious? Even Hidan isn't that cliché."

Itachi sent him a sharp glare before Shikamaru did a 180, scanning the room. A crack in the wall caught his attention, but upon further inspection, he decided that that's all it was. but after having stepped closer to examine it, he noticed trim hidden behind the still open door they'd come in from. He reached out to shut it, revealing a closed was silent behind him as he turned the knob, and turned away to cough as the smell that drifted out. He couldn't even name what it was, metallic, but gritty and musky like old wet concrete. And absoutly ripe with the smell of something dead.

"I'm pretty sure it's in here." He gagged.

Itachi slipped in front of him and Shikamaru happily backed away. The closet was tiny, no more than two by two, but someone had put a welcome mat in it. Itachi tsk'd at this. "He may not be cliché, but he's not above making it completley obvious."

The thought flashed through Shikamaru that maybe he wanted them to find it as Itachi kneeled down to pull back the mat, not surprisingly revealing an etched out half-circle. He stifled it though, and his phone buzzed in his pocket. He heard Itachi's annoyed sigh at the sound as he opened up the door and stifled a gag as the smell grew worse.

Shikamaru ripped the phone from his pocket and flipped it open. Asuma's voice filtered out, fast and alerted.

"He's not here, The button was left on the bed in the middle of some weird symbol."

Shikamaru's gut clenched, Hidan wasn't even trying to hide it. He was really that confident. "A circle with a triangle in it?"

"..Yeah.."

"I thought so." He slapped the phone shut and stuffed it back in it's pocket, Itachi was already shoulder deep in the hole. He'd probably get a scolding for just hanging up on his like that, but he didn't have time for another round of questions and vague answers. He briefly considered just leaving the phone up here so it wouldn't go off, but if this hidey-hole went as deep as itachi was saying, he wouldn't be able to get calls anyway.

"I hope you're not claustrophobic.." The Uchiha stated blandly before disappearing.

"I hope I'm not either.." Shikamaru replied, creases lining his brow as he lowered himself into the darkness.

---

"You're the biggest moron I've ever met."

"Shut up."

"You really think you're untouchable huh?"

"Shut... up."

"You pissed off the wrong person, Shikamaru Nara can be a cold bastard. You don't even know."

"SHUT THE FUCK UP!"

Neji glared into fiery violet eyes in the flickering light of the dark crimson candles Hidan had lit. "Or what?"

Hidan didn't grin as he responded, and it made Neji's courage falter.

"Or I'll shove something in your mouth to keep you quiet."

"He's going to find you whether I'm loud or not. You know your buddy is helping him too right? He's probably pissed that you used Sasuke like that."

Hidan glanced sideways at him, having turned around to a wooden table to fiddle with something. Neji forced himself to smile, "Yea, that's right, he figured everything out before you even showed up at the hospital. "

"Tch, he thought he had it figured out before. Like I would be fucking scared of *him*, seriously."

"But he's right this time, isn't he?"

Hidan was quiet over the sound of metal against metal, he was sharpening some sort of weapon. Neji felt like he was going to throw up, please let Shikamaru find him in time...

"He left you alone with me on purpose, because he knew you were going to kidnap me while I couldn't fight back."

"Show's you how much he cares about your saftey, eh princess?"

"He needed that Uchiha's help, and he knew he wouldn't unless he figured out that you used Sasuke on his own. You're in shit so deep you're drowning."

Hidan turned around, a tiny little serrated knife in his hand, and the corner of his mouth twitched up. "Don't swear, love. It doesn't suit you."

Neji's skin prickled at this, he didn't sound anything like Shikamaru obviously, but the sultry sound in Hidan's voice was something completely new and Neji would damn his own self to hell if he didn't admit it was sexy.

"You're a son of a bitch."



"Can't argue with that." Hidan said, leaning over Neji and setting his palm gently on the his cheek. "I really wish I had more time. Jashin's had his eye on you for so long it feels like, It's a shame I can't enjoy it a bit before he gets you."

Neji jerked his head away, wanting to scoot away but not wanting to fall on his face and be unable to squirm back upright. He would never have bondage fantasies again... He twisted his arms, bound behind him. He would give his soul right fucking now if he could just claw the psycho's eyes out...

"But, you have to be dead before they get here, and they're probably close."

Neji's eyes widened. He wasn't trying to get away with it at all, he was just trying to get it over with. And why not?, Neji realized. What the hell could they do to him? He closed his eyes as a wave of terror sent the room spinning.

"There you go princess. If you just accept it, it'll actually feel really fucking good." Hidan leaned forward again, tipping Neji's chin upward to the ceiling, and the Hyuga couldn't stop the shiver as the cold blade pressed on his naked peck. He didn't have to see Hidan's stupid grin to know it was there, and he sucked in a breath to keep from crying out when his skin parted as Hidan carved into him.

It was over in an instant, but the burn of the new wound was making his eyes water, and when Hidan pulled back, Neji couldn't resist looking down at it. It was that damn symbol, the same as Hidan's necklace, now etched permanently into his skin.

Son of a bitch, if he did live through this, that was going to cause serious fucking issues.

A tear slid down his cheek as he watched the blood seep from it, and he tried desperately not to sob. He better be here, he better fucking be here. Like.. now.

"Not so bad eh? At least it shut you up." Hidan said, sitting across from him and dragging the sharp knife across his right palm, and then the other. He stretched out and laid his hands flat on the smooth cement, dragging each other around in an arc in the opposite direction until they connected behind him. Neji winced as the contorted position Hidan had to take to reach behind himself like that.

The Albino twisted around and completed the circle with that upside-down triangle, and then wiped his hands off on his naked chest.

"Honestly, you should be happy. Like, I could have just done this the first day I saw you, wham-bam-thank you ma'am, and you're dead." Neji glared at him, trying and failing to keep his chin from quivering.

"Like really, it's so fucking difficult sometimes. If you just do it, and they fight you the whole time, it's fun y'know, but damn it's a hassle. Like, this is my fucking livelihood, why can't you fuckers just cooperate?"

Hidan leaned forward with one of those long-ass black pikes and scraped the tip against Neji's wound, making him hiss. And the brunette's heart nearly flew out his throat when the Jashinist retracted it back and licked the blood off the weapon, Mmm'ing as if it were frosting off a cake.

"And then Kuzu get's all on my ass about having to 'pick up after me' and make sure no one finds out and then we have to move and ugh, it's so fuckin' annoying ya know? So this time I did my best to appease everyone. Almost worked, I guess I'll have to try harder next time. "

"What went wrong?" Neji asked quietly, hiding his horror with the question as Hidan's skin changed color right before his eyes. The sheer black of his skin made him look like a shadow, and then the white paled over it, forming a skeletal image against the black. His question seemed to surprise Hidan as well, and it was quickly replaced with irritation, as if he didn't want to answer the question.

"Keep your fucking mouth shut and I'll make it quick, 'kay?"

"It was Shikamaru huh?"

Hidan only glared, gripping the pike tightly. And Neji couldn't help his sneer, just a small one since his chest still burned, but a sneer none-the-less. "You actually got to likeing him didn't you? When you started letting us sleep again, you were thinking about calling it off huh?"

Hidan's skeleton face was unreadable, but he finally responded. "You're gonna die anyway.." He said deeply, almost to himself, Neji suspected.

"It was nice to be normal." He said, looking down as he tossed the weapon from hand to hand. "You know, just go chill at each other's houses, fucking light up a bowl, relax."

"You're insane if you think *you* could ever be normal." Neji spat, twisting against the ropes that bound him.

Hidan's head snapped up, his eyes on fire. "You should be blaming yourself, not me, princess."

"How the fuck is this my fault?"

"You and your fucking attitude! You pissed me off! I was gonna drop it! I was going to fucking take Jashin's wrath and just skip over you two! But you had to go and keep fucking being a stupid little bitch! You know what happens when you piss me off? You think you just fucking die? Think again, you're going to be Jashin's fucking slave for the reset of eternity, you are his *property*, and he'll do whatever the fuck he wants to you, and there'll be nothing you can do!"

"You sound like a child with a grudge." Neji said back, matching Hidan's volume. He forced himself not to listen to Hidan's words, even if in some demented way they were starting to make sense.

The man was a lunatic, it was n onsense. "You're mad that you have to serve him so you push your pain onto other people!"

"Jashin is my saviour!" Hidan snarled, raising the pike threateningly. "How fucking dare you slander my devotion to him. He'll tear you open and fuck your insides for that."

Neji didn't even have time to think up more to say before Hidan spun the giant stake around, the sharp end aimed directly for his own heart. "You can't ever just fucking listen, princess, and now you're going to hurt for it, and beg for mercy like the bitch you are."

He shifted the angle of the weapon just slightly and plunged it into himself, and suddenly Neji's vision was qavering at the ear-splitting scream that erupted into the air. He tried to put his hands over his ears but they wouldn't move, they were stuck together with something. He couldn't move his legs either, and his throat was burning. He couldn't breathe, he realized, why couldnt he breathe? And that the fuck was that noise? And why did his side feel wet? Jesus christ would someone shut whoever is screaming the fuck up?

Wait, Neji thought as he tried to push his eyes back into his head without using his hands, which he remembered were tied up. It was him, he was screaming, he was screaming because someone had just shoved a 2-foot-long, 2 inch thick stake thorough his chest. His eyes rolled downward as he shut his mouth, silencing the screaing to loud, gasping sobs.

There was nothing there, that couldn't be right, it felt like there was. He was dying, someone was killing him but he couldn't even see it, he didn't know if it was real.

"Ohh Jashin forgive me for enjoying this so much.." someone moaned. "I promise he's yours, just let me make him suffer.."

Neji choked back the sounds he realized he was still making as everything came slamming back into him. "Shika.. will kill you.." He heard his voice say, ashamed as how small it sounded.

"I'd like to see him try.." Hidan said again in that smooth, sexy voice. Damn him, damn him and everyone and everything. How the hell was this really happening?

"Round two!" Hidan suddenly chirped, and Neji was thrown into another state of hysteria and confusion as some imaginary thing was shoved through his thigh. He recovered from this one faster, though, and spat out more empty threats and insults. He swore he could taste blood in his mouth but when he weakly haucked a loogie in Hidan's direction there was no red at all.

In fact, aside from his Jashin symbol on his chest, Hidan was the only one bleeding. Hidan was the only one with weapons protruding from him as he moaned and praised his demon God. What kind of jutsu was this? What the fuck was going on here. He was feeling everything Hidan did, but that fucking masochist was getting off on it, screaming in ecstasy instead of pain.

"Shikamaru.." Neji sobbed. He'd let him down again. It didn't matter at this point if he rescued him or not. He was going to die, really die this time. The beating he'd taken from Sasuke was nothing compared to this.

He was down here in the grungy, bloody, dark hole and he was going to die in a sacrifice to an evil imaginary deity. He almost preferred dying by the youngest Uchiha's hand to this.

---

Shikamaru had just stepped off the ladder into the pitch blackness when he heard the scream, that soul-wrenching scream that he knew without a single doubt in all the world was Neji.

"No!" He said, taking off in the direction only to collide with Itachi, who swore and shoved him off.

"Let me lead you, you'll get there faster."

"Let go I have to stop him!" Shikamaru shrilled, as he yanked his arm away and ran straight into a concrete wall. His body fell briefly into a limp pile on the floor as blood filled his mouth and flowed out his nose and down his chin before he was yanked up painfully to his feet again.

The darkness spun around him. Yes, that was possible. And he reached a hand out to lie against the wall as Itachi yanked him forward. "Don't be stupid." The Uchiha growled, "I can barely even see with the Sharingan, but it's enough."

Another scream erupted through the space, bouncing off the walls and amplifying the sound to the point where even Itachi dropped Shikamaru's wrist to cover his ears. Shikamaru just grabbed the shoulder of Itachi's cloak, sobered by the quieter echo of Hidan's muffled voice and groans.

It couldn't possibly be that far if it was under his house, hell that wasn't any more of a trek than walking across the street. But as Itachi powerwalked on, he became conscious that they were walking in a continuous circle, the path was spiraling down deeper and deeper, he knew because his ears were aching slightly from the pressure.

"How the fuck did he make this?"

"He didn't, keep your voice down."

"How is it here?"

"Jashinism is more common than you think. It's just well hidden. This was here even before your house was."

"How do you know all this?"

"You think I'd associate with Hidan and not learn all the details of his life?"

"... Then.. you knew."

"No." Itachi said quickly, "I didn't know what he was doing, I didn't figure it out until Sasuke.." Itachi trailed off and Shikamaru didn't pursue, mostly because of the dim glow showing from around the last corner.

*"You fucking psycho!"* He heard Neji half shout and half cry.

Shikamaru could stop the pathetically unmanly cry that escaped him at the scene he came upon. Neji convulsed on the floor in the middle of the candle-lit room, his shirt was off and what looked like that fucking circle was carved into his chest, smeared with blood and dust.

Shikamaru shouted and dove for Hidan, the man's altered skin tone only causing the slightest bit of confusion. He didn't fucking care that the man had painted his body just for the occasion, he didn't care that the man actually looked like a true-blue (or black and white, in this case) demon. He didn't care that the man was already tearing into his own skin with his nails as he clawed at the gaping, bloody holes in his chest and both thighs.

The Nara collided with him and easily got on top of him, straddling him as he wrapped his hands around the Zealot's throat. Hidan's eyes were rolled back in his head, he hadn't seemed to notice his neighbor's presence yet, even though he was gargling his own blood as Shikamaru squeezed as tight as he possibly could on the man's throat.

"YOU STUPID SON OF A BITCH!" He screamed at Hidan, whose eyes focused on Shikamaru. He grinned, and Shikamaru lost it, all planning went out the window as all the rage he'd been holding back since Hidan had first moved in exploded out of him. He pulled his hand back and let his fist fly freely to collide with Hidan's jaw. It gave a sickening crack and Hidan's laughter only came bursting out shriller as Neji screamed bloody murder.

"Get him out of the circle!" He heard Itachi shout distantly, and when he grabbed a fistfull of Hidan's hair and yanked him up only to slam the back of his skull into the concrete with all of his might, he felt something wrap around his middle and pull him backward.

"StopitpleaseGodjuststop!" Neji was sobbing as Shikamaru's butt hit the floor. Hidan's insane laughter filled the room and Shikamaru's vision was turning red as he struggled against the force holding him back.

"For fuck's sake you're hurting Neji more than Hidan!" Itachi shouted in his ear.

"I'll fucking kill him!" Shikamaru shouted back, too angry to comprehend anything. He heard a growl and stars burst into his vision as he was flung to the side, right into the wall, again. He opened his eyes, as if seeing what was happening for the first time.

Hidan was still laughing, or he thought he was, it had turned into some terrifying series of noises that Shikamaru forced himself to ignore. Itachi was wrestling with him, trying to push him out of the circle made in blood on the floor, he realized as Itachi's command earlier came back to him.

his eyes went to Neji's shouting on the floor and writhing against the ropes that tied him up. His face was crunched grotesquely in pain even though the only wound Shikamaru could see was the symbol on his chest. It didn't seem all that deep, though it would definitely leave a scar...

What the hell was Hidan doing to him?

Was this what he almost did to Sasuke?

He sucked in a breath, it was a sacrifice. He was trying to sacrifice Neji, this was how it worked, This was his power. It wasn't even Jutsu, it was.. he didn't know what it was, but it was terrifying.



He'd wanted to know so badly what Hidan was capable of, and now he'd give just about anything to go back to being ignorant and naive. This was how he was killing people, he tortured them without even touching them, he maimed himself but somehow made them feel everything while he practically screwed himself at the pleasure the pain caused him.

Satal fucking masochist to the extreme.

"You're too fucking late!" Hidan squealed, "It can't be stopped, I'll kill him! He's as good as dead! You cannot escape Jashin's will!" Still though, he continued to struggle against Itachi, trying desperately to keep at least one foot inside the circle.

Itachi muttered out an apology to Neji as he retracted his fist and slammed it into the back of Hidan's head right where skull and neck connected. Neji choked and stiffed for a second before he went limp, and Hidan mimicked the action. At this, Itachi dragged the limp body a few feet backward. Shikamaru's eyes widened as almost immediately after Hidan was pulled from the circle, his black and white skin turned back to normal. It hadn't been paint, his skin had actually changed during the ritual...

Good God in heaven, maybe Jashin was a real thing..

His attention snapped back to his unconscious lover on the floor, and he stumbled/crawled over to him, brushing hair out of his face. He lifted a hand to make sure he was alive, and when the terrible lighting yielded no results he put two fingers against his jugular vein, which he probably should have just done in the first place.

He had a pulse, it was fast with adrenaline and being in shock, the only thing that was keeping Neji from being in an immense amount of pain despite his lack of horrible injuries. He knew he had felt everything that Hidan did, and The jashinist had fucked himself up royally. What he didn't know was if it was real or more like an illusion.

He looked to Itachi, his eyes pleading for good news. "Is he going to be okay?" He asked, hating himself for it. God he despised when people asked that. 'Are you okay?' Like, no, he hadn't just almost been sacrificed to a demon god and been tortured unmercifully. He was totally okay.

"He'll be fine, the connection was broken and the pain should be gone when he wakes up, he'll just be incredibly sore. We stopped it before Hidan killed himself, and in turn, his victim."

Shikamaru scowled at him. There was no way he could have known that just by doing research.

"Itachi.."

"I'll explain later.." Itachi said, adjusting Hidan so he could drag him back to the surface. "Let's go."

"Not yet." Shikamaru said, his face hardening. Itachi hesitated, looking annoyed. "I want you to promise me that I can take care of him."

"I can assure you that I know what to do."

"I don't care. I have a personal vendetta. No offense, but I don't trust you to keep him contained."

" *No offense..*" Itachi said sarcastically "But you of all people should not be acting like you know how to deal with Hidan. I promise nothing."

"What if I tell you what I'm planning on doing?"

Itachi paused, and began dragging the unconscious Hidan back toward the dark spiral. How they were going to hoist two limp bodies back up through that tiny hole in that tiny closet, Shikamaru had no idea.

"I might consider it."

---

---

Asuma adjusted the collar of his suit, listening to the funeral home director drone on. He cleared his throat quietly, and leaned over to Shikamaru.

"Can you *please* explain what the hell happened now?" He murmured, barely moving his lips. Itachi, standing across from them on the other side of the casket, met Shikamaru's gaze for only a second before flicking his eyes back down to the beautiful arrangement of flowers on top of the polished ebony coffin.

The preacher continued on, not even noticing Asuma.

Shikamaru sighed, and squeezed Neji's hand tighter. Neji didn't respond, and only glared at the fancy box that would probably cause it to burst into flames if looks could kill.

"It was Hidan." He muttered back under his breath. Asuma gave him a "No shit, sherlock." glance, and Shikamaru continued.

"He was a jashinist, a high priest, which is the highest rank you can get in that cult of a religion. Believe it or not, he was dead once, that's why his eyes are purple and his hair is silver and he's so pale even though he's always out in the sun with no shirt."

The theory was absolutely ludicrous, but he believed it. He was beyond needing proof to believe crazy stories, he'd just lived through a tall-tale.

He ignored the disbelieving look Asuma was giving him and went on. "Jashin is real. Believe it or not, I witnessed his power with my own eyes. It wasn't a jutsu, it was some kind of magic that I just can't explain. You wanna think I'm crazy? Go ahead, but that's what happened. Anyway.." Shikamaru paused as the holy man sent a glare his way, obviously having noticed Shikamaru talking at the same time he was.

"Anyway, the only way Hidan could stay alive was to keep sending souls back to Jashin. He's been sacrificing peoples souls. He doesn't even have to touch them to kill him, that's why cause of death could never be determined. All he has to do is taste a single drop of your blood." Shikamaru was suddenly aware of Kakuzu staring at him, standing apart from and behind everyone else. The older man looked downright eerie in a suit with his face covered like that. It wasn't a glare, there was no emotion in it at all, as was usual for the stoic man. He was simply staring, and he didn't look away when Shikamaru met his gaze, he didn't even blink. Just stood there with his arms across his chest, as if just waiting for this to be over with instead of greiving the loss of his lover.

Shikamaru looked back to the casket. Hidan was in a million peices inside, his mouth stuffed with a sock and ducktaped shut. The hole he would be lowered into was lined with 6 thick inches of concrete, and then in turn would have more poured over him after the 'funeral' was over and everyone had left. He would be stuck in there like a mummy until Jashin took his soul back or decided he didn't want it.

"Since he first moved here, he used being in the Akatsuki to keep him off the radar. Seeing as they were looking for the killer as well. When he found out that I suspected him, he hired Sasuke to beat Neji within an inch of his life and get caught in the process. Then he lost his temper and almost killed him, Which Itachi stopped. Sasuke almost got away, but Deidara went and fetched Sasori, (Shikamaru had learned the redhead's name finally) and together they tracked him down and brought him back to their base."

Shikamaru swallowed heavily. He could write a fucking book about this and be rich as hell. But he really didn't want to have to relive every detail...

"He even had me fooled until I was talking with Neji in the hospital... He said that I needed the Akatsuki to catch the killer.. and I realized that Hidan had been relying on me trying to do everything alone. The only people who would even have a chance in hell was the Akatsuki, but being on the opposite side of the law.. well you know."

"But you tried to join, and they were considering it." Asuma said, making Shikamaru turn with a brow raised. The older man just shrugged slightly, you didn't get to be head of police without being able to get information. Letting Shikamaru fill him in was usually more accurate and just plain easier than doing it himself, but it wasn't as if he'd forgotten how.

"I thought they were in on it.. But Hidan saw it as an opportunity. Neji said he admitted to thinking about calling it off, one small sane part of him wanted to be my friend, I guess." Shikamaru swallowed, ashamed of himself for knowing the albino had grown on him too. And more ashamed of the feeling of betrayal... "He tried to get me to be a Jashinist too. It would have been a perfect way out for him, he could have Neji and me both."

The Holy Man cleared his throat and paused while he stared at them. Shikamaru huffed slightly, wondering if the man would be so adverse to their lack of respect if he knew who was in that coffin. The few people of the crowd shifted to look at him, and he reddened just the slightest bit, the Akatsuki was here, a few of the police force, as well as a few other random people that he wasn't even sure why they were here.

The bigwigs at the other law enforcement departments around the state had been informed that the man responsible had been caught and adheared to. As far as the judicial part, not giving Hidan a trial had been overlooked, seeing as he'd 'perished' during the capture attempt, and the media was all too happily relaying this as far as their reach could go. Luckily, anyone who knew Hidan wasn't talking, so all they had was a sketch of what they thought he might look like, and Shikamaru had almost pissed himself laughing when he first saw the picture. They were sooo far off.

Neji hadn't found it humorous at all.

When the preacher-man finally started on again, Asuma nudged him. "So not letting you get any sleep had been part of his plan all along. He wanted you off your game."

Shikamaru nodded, "He also messed with Neji's mind, made him think he was having night terrors, making him so paranoid that I would dismiss everything he said. He was toying with us and I couldn't even see it. I was blinded by so many other things, mental fatigue just being the topper."

"And what about him?" Asuma gestured to Kakuzu, still staring.

"I'm not sure. I don't think he knew. I don't know anything about him, so I have no idea if he fits into this or not."

"You really think he didn't know about the hole in the ground?"

Shikamaru shrugged. He had done enough work, Kakuzu may have been aware, but he had taken no part in it. He hadn't tried to help Hidan, he hadn't tried to stop them in their endeavors. He was as much a bystanding third party as anyone else. The man wasn't a threat, Shikamaru thought, and he felt unease settle in his gut, and tried to push it away. Even if he was, he didn't care. The case had been solved, it was over, and he was done with it. He'd already requested his transfer, he wasn't only moving to a new town, he was moving across the country. Being in the business he was, there was no way to do it without a paper trail, but honestly he didn't think it mattered at this point.

Hidan wasn't getting out of there.

The Funeral director snapped his book shut and bent down to grab a handful of dirt and toss it on the casket. A few more lines were spoken by him before he stepped back, holding his hands behind him, and nodded to another man with some sort of control box on his lap. He fiddled with it before a mechanical whirr sounded out and the human-sized box began lowering into the hole.

Everyone jerked slightly as Neji stepped forward and spat on it, then ripped his hand from Shikamaru's and stalked away. The Holy Man watched him go, baffled.

"Well, that's it for me." Asuma said, pulling a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. "I'll stop by later." He lit one up and turned to walk away.

"I won't be there.." Shikamaru whispered, his gaze still cast down into Hidan's tomb. He had his car full, a couple moving vans were already on their way with the rest of his things that had survived. He was surprised to find that he still had quite a lot of shit left, Neji had been overjoyed, in a pissed off sort of way.. He wasn't going back to his house, or what used to be his house. He already said his goodbyes, to all the material things at least. He hadn't told his friends, or his co-workers. He didn't want waterworks, he didn't want emotions. He would welcome their anger at him for up and leaving, maybe they wouldn't pursue..

*Soldiers will not stop at any means until someone they deem worthy has either converted, or is dead.*

Shikamaru didn't know if it applied to all jashinists, or just those called soldiers.. And he told himself it didn't matter. *Refusal resulted in death of one or the other.* It had said, and Hidan was as good as dead.

Shikamaru had won.

It was over with, he could move on with his life.

He pulled out his own pack of cigarettes, finally noticing now that he was the only one there. Everyone else had scattered rather quickly, even Kakuzu had finally broken his stare to disappear.

After he lit the stick and took a drag, he reached into his other pocket, opening his palm to stare at the object within for a moment before tossing it into the hole. He heard the sharp snapping of glass and sighed, "One bad habit replaces another..." he muttered to the broken marijuana pipe, before he took another drag of his cigarette. He could never smoke it again, even sober he kept recalling that night, how normal and relaxing and *fun* it had been. How he

secretley wished for it again. Hidan had been willing to suffer the wrath of his god, even die, just to feel that content normalcy.

What made him change, he didn't know, Neji hadn't explained any further than that. Jashin's will was just too strong, he supposed. Or perhaps the zealot really was scared of death, actual real, lasting, permanent death, and he hadn't wanted it enough to risk it...

It didn't matter now, he supposed.

Shikamaru nodded to the casket and turned away.

This was all such a God damned drag...

---

A/N-

Remember!

There's an epilogue.

So yea. I'm in a super writey mood, so it might be up in like.. soon.

Also thinking about making just like a one chapter little sequel, but we'll have to see about that. I'm going to comb through the story and fix and add and tweak things first. So don't get too excited.

But! REVIEWWWW!

Did everything make sense? It all added up right?

Muahaha, oh god all that giant headache of planning and crap that I did paid off.

I'm happy with it at least.



# Epilogue

## Bad Neighbors

The rain was dreadful, completely and utterly. It poured down relentlessly, making the entirety of this process moot. As soon as a shovel full of mud was removed and tossed aside, more slid in.

And of course it would be raining. Why the hell he hadn't expected it was beyond him.

This was stupid, it was all so stupid. Why did he put up with this crap? Why didn't he just walk away now? Why? Why?

"I do not envy you right now."

He looked up, wanting to wipe the mud off his brow but resisting, seeing as any part of himself he used would just slop more on.

"Is this really what you do? You haven't found any faster, more effective methods?"

"If something isn't broken there's no need to fix it. Besides, I'm not spoiled and lazy like today's generation." The older man continued digging, expression unreadable even without his face covered. The stitches on his face gave him a macabre type of smile, running from the corners of his mouth to his ears.

Itachi rolled his eyes and crouched down next to the tombstone. It looked to be hundreds of years old, any words long faded away, though in reality it had only been a month. He ran an almost feminine hand over it, people were so brainless sometimes. It was a genius idea to make the stone like that, so as not to give away a name or anything of the sort, but the freshly disturbed ground had raised a few questions. Or so he'd thought it would, no one had noticed, or cared enough to comment on it. And now that the grass had finally

started growing over the mound in front of the stone, it was being dug out again.

Didn't matter, Kakuzu surely knew what he was doing. He'd done this enough times.

"Always stuck picking up his messes. You're such a good mother."

Kakuzu stopped again to look up at the Uchiha blankley, his long chocolate hair plastered to his face, mud clinging to him up to his waist. He'd long abandoned his shirt, taking it off first to wipe the mud off, then just tossing it away when it had gotten too muddy to do any good. It wasn't something that reflected Hidan's actions, he was a hard working man and he could take his damn shirt off if he wanted.

When he didn't say anything, Itachi cleared his throat. "Nara and Hyuga are far enough away, they're so deeply scarred by this that there's no way they'll open their mouths. The head of police passed away a few days ago in a crash with a Semi-truck. Your doing I suppose.." Kakuzu didn't respond, though it answered the question well enough. Itachi didn't hide his irritation, and pushed his wet bangs out of his face.

"I wish you wouldn't keep doing that. We're here to protect.."

"I'm protecting Hidan." Kakuzu stated bluntly. He returned to his digging, growling when a small mudslide set him three shovels back.

Itachi pinched between his eyes and sighed, "Still, I'd relocate if I were you. There are always rumors left, it would be best not to let the paranoid bring them to life."

"I assumed as much.." Kakuzu growled, "And so starts another search to find his stupid 'hidden chambers'. They don't just advertise it you know. And usually the hatches are carpeted over, sometimes they're even concreted shut.."

Itachi smiled, and Kakuzu just scowled at him.

"What the hell is wrong with me.." Kakuzu sighs, stopping as his shovel suddenly collides with something solid. Itachi stiffens too, That hadn't been the sound of metal against concrete. So the old man had somehow found a way to keep the Jashinist from being cemented in. He frowned, The miser had probably killed him... Dammit. It was so hard to feel like a good person when you keep finding out that your friends are killing people.

"Unfortunatley for us.." He breathed as Kakuzu leaned down to dig around the edges of the box. "The psycho has somehow got us to care for him. Love, Kakuzu, is what it's called."

Itachi handed Kakuzu a rope which he looped around the brass handles he found on the side of the casket, and handed the ends back to the elder Uchiha. Then he struggled his way up out of the muddie hole, snarling every time he slid back in and Itachi stifled a snicker.

"Is his majesty the one doing this?!" Kakuzu raged after he finally rolled himself free, looking more like a mud golem now than a person.

"What do you think? He'd rather just leave Hidan buried for what he did. But he's giving you another chance, a heavily supervised one."

"Is that why you're here?" Kakuzu pushed himself to his feet and trudged over beside Itachi, taking one end of the rope. Together they pulled, and after a heartbeat and a sick sucking sound, the casket upended in the hole.

"I wanted to say goodbye." Itachi growled.

"Are you leaving him?" Kakuzu said unusually calmly for lugging a 6x3x2 heavy wooden box out of a quicksand-like mudpit.

"I've decided to force myself back into Sasuke's life. I thought he had enough of a brain to make good choices. But I was apparently wrong." They both gave a great heave after the edge of the coffin became visible from where they were standing, and the whole front slid up onto solid ground.

"You really do this by yourself every time?"

"It's usually not in the middle of a monsoon.."

Again they yanked, heels digging into the muddy soil, and the casket tipped, having most of the weight out of the hole now. It fell over almost in slow motion like a tree, landing flat with the rear edge still hanging over the hole. The two pulled it safely away from the pit before dropping the rope. Itachi stood there panting and uselessly wiping the rain from his face. Kakuzu moved to the tombstone and bent to retrieve a crowbar, and made his way to the coffin without hesitation.

After jamming one end into the spot where the crack should be, (it was super heavy-duty glued shut upon Shikamaru's request. Apparently you can't be too careful.) He forced it open with relatively little effort, and Itachi stepped forward, surprised at what he found.

"That's impressive." He stated plainly. Hidan had somehow managed to get himself back in one piece, though there were still nasty, purple, almost rotten looking marks in all the places where he'd obviously been ripped apart. His eyes were open and glazed over, and he had dried blood caking his fingertips. This brought the Uchiha's eyes to the inside of the lid. The rain had already begun pooling in the bottom, and the lack of light made it hard to see, but he could make it out after silently activating the Sharingan.

The words were caked in blood and hardly legible, but he knew what it said.

His will be done.

A dark feeling settled over him as Kakuzu pulled out a knife and slit the edge of his finger. The older man leant over Hidan and held out his hand, massaging his blood into the Jashinist gaping mouth.

Immediately Hidan's chest heaved and his body convulsed as his skin changed to its ritual colors. He didn't move though, and his eyes didn't show any life.

"This is the worst part.." Kakuzu muttered as he pulled one of Hidan's black pike's from a mud-covered strap on his calf.

Itachi's lips parted as he resisted letting his surprise show. "No.."

"I don't like it either, but it's all that works." Kakuzu growled before plunging that stake down right through his heart. He gargled something for a moment before falling to his knees. Itachi only watched, unsure of whether to be horrified or interested.

Finally he collapsed onto his side, and there was nothing but the sound of the rain for a few peaceful seconds. It was ruined by an over-dramatic gasp followed by a long string of profanities. And Itachi sighed, sending his gaze back to the coffin.

Hidan was sitting upright now, hacking and rasping unattractively. "Son of a BITCH!" He croaked, slamming his fist onto his chest. "For Jashin's fucking SAKE that hurts so damn much."

"Evening, Hidan."

The albino paused and turned his head to the Uchiha, looking absolutely priceless in his confusion.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Wishing I wasn't. That's repulsive, by the way." Itachi nodded toward Kakuzu, who was already moving again as the skin of his back bulged and something underneath it repositioned itself. "I'll never understand you two's relationship."

Hidan clicked his tongue after he finished stretching and pulled himself unsteadily to his feet. "You love it and you know it. What the hell took so long you old fucker!?" Hidan said, stumbling as he tried to take a step toward Kakuzu.

"Shut up Hidan. I only waited a month this time." Kakuzu said, yanking the weapon from his chest and tossing it. He pulled himself up slowly and cracked his neck. "You should be thanking me. I could have just left."

"Well then why fucking didn't you? I could have gotten out on my own. Why is it fucking raining so hard?"

"Shut up." Kakuzu and Itachi said simultaneously, then exchanging glances.

"Let's go, I need a shower."

"Are we moving again Kuzu?"

"What do you think?"

"Awe c'mon this one wasn't even that bad, remember Cincinatti?"

"I try not to."

"You can't be mad at me, I was careful!"

"And yet I was still right, and left cleaning up after you."

"You stupid old fucking miser, can't you just look on the bright side."

"Shut up or I'll put you back in the ground."

Kakuzu started toward the front gate of the cemetery, and Itachi glanced nervously behind him. "You're not going to try to hide that?"

"I have someone coming to take care of it. Just more money I had to spend to cover your ass." Kakuzu said, shoving Hidan ahead of him.

A pair of headlights coming down the road caught the Sharingan user's attention, and he took quick steps to catch up with the zombie couple.

"Hidan.."

The albino twisted his head to look at Itachi, pausing for only a second before being shoved forward again by Kakuzu. He griped at the older man before looking back.

"Do you remember what I said?"

Hidan raised a silver eyebrow. "You say a lot of shit, red-eyes."

Itachi looked calmly back and forth between Hidan and Kakuzu, and the older man seemed to get the hint. Without expression he slowed his pace, letting Hidan walk on oblivious, and Itachi came up behind him.

"You could have used anyone other than Sasuke, and I could have overlooked it." He said quietly, and Hidan's eyes widened in realization. His mouth dropped open just as he stiffened to leap away, but Itachi was faster.

"Now you pissed me off!" In one smooth swift motion he directed his chakra down to his feet, something he'd had the grace to learn while fighting his younger brother, and twirled in a circle. His foot connected soundly with Hidan's chest and an invisible wave rolled backward a split second before Hidan rocketed backward.

There was a crack, a boom and an explosion as body collided with car. The driver didn't even have time to stop. Itachi stayed where he was, smiling, when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"That was the guy who was going to clean this up for us.." Kakuzu's voice said just behind him.

"Now you get to do it." the muddy hand patted his shoulder before the older man stepped around him and walked on. "You get to cover your own mess up too. Hidan and I have to catch a plane."

Itachi stared after them, standing in place in the pouring rain.

"What a drag.." He muttered, and smiled to himself.

---

A/N- You really didn't think I'd kill off Hidan did you? Tch, please, I love him waaay more than Shikamaru.

Well, don't have much else to say. I'm tired as shit, so, hope you enjoyed it. Love you all.

REVIEW!

EDITZ!- Helloo everyone I don't know if you get notifications for edits on chapters but i really didn't want to post another chapter and get you all excited just to tell you that I've started a sequel after all. Check out my profile to find it.

Love you all and thanks for supporting meeeee!



# Bonus chapter

## Bad Neighbors

A/N- Hey errbody, I decided to give you all here alittle bit of a bonus chappie. Mostly to make sure you're all perfectly fucking aware that I have started a sequel, and if i don't get your reviews then I'll probably go sacrifice a small goat.

So yeah, save the goat.

While enjoying this chapter. :)

---

Sasuke ran, the person in front of him, his target, was fast. He could admit that much, but for all the speed and versatility she had, she was severely lacking in strength. Stupid girl, keep running, you're only working yourself up.

Sasuke took a sharp left when his victim turned the corner, She was trying to find someone to help, she didn't need to do anything else, surely once her attacker was intimidated he would leave her alone.

It wasn't goi ng to happen though, no one could see her, thanks to a bit of genjutsu, and she couldn't see all the people she kept running past. She was going to die, the stupid, rich, spoiled, know-it-all bitch.

He'd never accepted a job yet where the objective was to kill the target. But after that unfortunate run-in with his brother, Sasuke was only reminded of how much anger and hatred he still held inside. If it pissed Itachi off to know he was just hurting people for money, imagine how he'd feel when he found out he was killing them. And not just killing them, mercilessly killing them.

He smiled to himself as he imagined a heartbroken Itachi.

Why the hell shouldn't he? His brother had killed their parents, his aunts and uncles... He didn't care about the reasons why. He didn't care how bad of people they were. He grew up with *no one*.

In a tiny little town like that. It had made Sasuke famous, but not in the way anyone would want.

Everyone knew, no matter if they were a hundred years old or just learning to talk. Everyone knew that his brother slaughtered his family. Everyone knew that Sasuke's only family was locked up in an insane asylum halfway across the state. Everyone knew that Sasuke was completely and utterly alone and traumatized by suddenly having everything ripped away from him when he was just barely old enough to remember.

And they did *nothing*.

He was an Uchiha, he had the bad blood, he was a troubled child and no one wanted him because no one thought they could help him. Someone else would do it, they said, someone else who was better suited to give him what he needed would step forward and raise him, show him what it was like to be loved, what it was like to think that someone valued his existence.

It really couldn't have been that hard.

But he was not their child, they could not love him, they could not think of him as a son. He was dark and brooding from being hurt so badly that there was nothing at all he could ever think of to be happy about.

They were scared of him, judging him before they knew him only because he was related to the man who had killed everyone he should have loved dearly.

Except Sasuke. He'd let the young child live, as if it were some noble deed and not the absolute worst form of torture to let him grow up knowing that he was all alone in the world.

He hated Itachi. He hated him so much that he didn't even want revenge. He wanted Itachi to know he hated him, and he wanted him to feel unwanted, he wanted to kill him inside while letting him live physically. Being part of the world and yet separate.

The girl screamed as he caught up to her and wrapped his arm around her throat from behind. He had never murdered before, but it couldn't be so hard. He'd seen the eyes of the numerous people he had beaten nearly to death, he saw their desperation to live, he saw them accept their death, some even remained unbelieving of their fate.

Surely he could look into the cold, dead eyes of this woman and feel nothing.

He couldn't feel anything else, no matter how he tried.

Just cold, lonely, absolute nothing.

He raised the blade to her throat. In one second it would be done, in one more instant she would be his first victim among the many more that would follow. Her family and friends would mourn her and curse him to the worst death possible, and he would not care.

Suddenly there was someone behind him, a chakra signature that was unmistakable. And before he could make that tiny movement to slit her throat a delicate, almost feminine-looking hand wrapped around his wrist and twisted it just short of the point of breaking it.

He was thrown violently to the side and the woman shrieked again when he hit the tin wall and tore through it inside the department store that he had just half a second ago been outside of.

That hurt. It hurt a lot, and his anger exploded inside him like a gasoline-fed fire.

He pushed chakra into his feet and launched himself from the rubble back out into the street, pulling his katana and igniting it with

electricity.

He was interfereing *again*. As if he had any right, as if he had the responsibility.

Where had this responsibilty been when he was growing up in a world full of hateful and pitied glances. In a world where people walking past him would stiffen and pretend they weren't afraid for their lives though they had nothing to back that fear.

Sasuke was going to slice him up and beat him within an inch of his life, but make sure to let him live. He would make his brothers outside scarred and mutated and ugly just like his soul.

But he was caught by the throat, and squeezed so tightly that his body went slack against his will and he dropped his weapon. He looked into his brother's mangekyo and felt nothing but pure unrestrained rage.

He would not kill Sasuke. He knew this, they both did, and so he forced himself to smile.

"What do you think you're going to accomplish from this, little brother?" Itachi said calmly, still gripping so tightly that air could not escape nor reach his lungs.

Good, he didn't want to answer him anyway. There were no words to say, there was only the wrath.

The two stayed locked in this stareing contest until his body threatened to shut down forever from lack of oxygen, and Itachi released his grip.

In an instant the weapon was back in his hand and through his's brothers chest, but he only looked at Sasuke emotionlessly before bursting into a flock of ravens.

Of course it wasn't that easy.

His weapon was knocked from his hand and his arms were pinned behind his back before he could even look around to find the real Itachi.

His face slammed into the concrete and he grunted at the weight on his back.

"I have decided to become a permanent fixture in your life, Sasuke. I thought you had the brains not to go down this road, I would have let you be. But I cannot stand idly by as you continue to throw away the chance I gave you for a better life."

"You /took away/ my chance for a better life." Sasuke growled quietly. "Stop pretending to be my hero."

"You were too young to know Sasuke. I don't fault you for feeling the way you do. But it was a necessary risk."

"SHUT UP!" Sasuke screamed, channeling chakra through his body, giving him the strength to rip his arms from his brother's grip and roll himself to his feet.

"You killed the only people in the world to have ever loved me! You stole everything from me! You didn't even have the decency to let me join them! You forced me into this, and then you act as if you're my savior!"

He lunged, pulling a dagger from its sheath hidden beneath his sleeve. Itachi wasn't even moving as his brother sped toward him, and it only made him angrier. How could he be so calm? How could he stand there playing the victim? He murdered his family and now his little brother was trying to kill him and it didn't faze him. He could run around with a gang of criminals and yet he thought what Sasuke was doing is wrong?

He swung at Itachi, who sidestepped and knocked his feet out from under Sasuke. He caught himself and with a few flips backward

there was space between them again. Sasuke made a ring with his index finger and thumb and held it to his mouth.

"Katon!" he bellowed, and a giant fireball formed and went racing toward Itachi and all the other people who had stopped to watch them fight.

Itachi still stood calmly, closing his eyes and taking a breath. When he opened them up the air in front of him seemed to twist counter clockwise in a funnel and the fireball disappeared into it.

"Sasuke. You are wasting energy. "

The younger brother growled and pulled his last dagger out of the opposing sleeve. He death-glared at Itachi, daring him to try to take his one from him.

The elder of the two just sighed. And with only a flicker of movement he was in front of his brother.

He ripped the weapon from his hand and tossed it away and just as Sasuke tensed up to jump backward Itachi wrapped his arms around him and pulled him tight against his body.

Sasuke, taken completely off guard, nearly choked at the embrace.

"I'm sorry.." Itachi whispered. "I'm sorry for everything you went through, I'm sorry for leaving you alone, I'm Sorry Sasuke."

He struggled against it, but weakly, it... it felt good. It felt good in a bad sort of way, his chest was aching. Or.. something inside it.

"I can't fix the past. I can't change the mistakes I've made. But I can keep you from making them. I don't care if you hate me, I don't care if you run. I don't care if you try to kill me. I'm not going to give up until I can convince you..."

Itachi clutched tighter, almost to the point where the younger was having trouble breathing.

Sasuke closed his eyes. He didn't want to hear this, he didn't care about Itachi. He left him alone, all alone. He was the enemy. There was nothing he could say to change it.

"You *are* loved, little brother. I will not leave you alone any longer. You can resist it, you can push me away. But I'm going to be here. I going to do what I should have done when they first released me. I know now you only say the things you do because of your pain, I should have known that before. I'm Sorry. There's nothing more to say except that."

Sasuke forced himself to take a breath.

*Go away. He wanted to say. I don't want your love. I don't want your company. I hate you. I HATE you.*

But Itachi pulled back, and something in his chest clenched and twisted to where it physically affected him.

Itachi's eyes were misty, they shimmered in the daylight as more and more water built up. And he grabbed the nape of his younger brothers neck and pulled as he leaned forward, until their foreheads rested together.

"You are not alone, you are not unloved. I'm here for you, I will continue to be here."

Sasuke's breath hitched as a tear slid out of his brothers dark, damp eyes. And that pain in him grew so terrible that he stiffened against it.

No, he didn't care. He *couldn't* care.. He never could before, Itachi couldn't change that.

He... he couldn't..

But seeing him, smiling so sadly and yet happy with tears running down the face which had been so permanently emotionless as long

as he could remember... His own vision blurred, he felt himself shaking. He.. he was going to throw up.

No, something other than that... He was going to *blow* up. He was going to explode right here and now into a million peices. And Itachi would witness it and... and...

"I love you, Sasuke. I will *a/ways* love you."

Here it came... His face contorted in the pain, his eyes clenched shut and what could only be blood went running down his cheeks.

He clenched his teeth, but it didn't stop the sob, or the one that followed, or all the other humiliating sounds and hiccups that came next.

He couldn't move, it hurt so bad.

He was going to collapse, he realized, as his body swayed and toppled forward.

But someone caught him, someone actually caught him and without knowing why, despising himself for such a weak action, he lifted his hands up and clutched whoever had kept him from falling.

No one ever caught him, no one else helped him when he was weak, it had always been him and only him. He had always, *a/ways* been so completley, utterly, helplessly alone...

"It..it hurts!" he wailed through a sob into the person's chest. Why did it hurt so bad! It was like someone was ripping his heart right out through his chest but it kept stretching and stretching as they pulled and he waited for the snap as it finally came free... but it wouldn't come.

Just the tears... yes... those were tears, they weren't blood. He was crying, he realized.



He didn't cry though, Sasuke Uchiha had not cried since he was in the single digits of age.

"It does." A familiar voice croaked back. "But it's good pain Sasuke. It's so good."

The arms around him clutched tighter and he repeated the action.

*I'm not alone.*

It was all he could do to wrap the thought around his head.

*I'm not alone. I'm not alone!*

It was so bizarre, it.. it couldn't be true... but someone was here holding him while he cried like a weak, pathetic, little baby.

He opened his eyes finally, remembering who it was, realizing what he was doing as the pain began to fade. He sucked in a breath and forced the sobs and hiccups to stop, and pulled himself back to his feet.

He stared into his brother's red eyes. Not red with Sharingan, but red from crying. Red with joy, red with relief.

Itachi caught him when he collapsed, he squeezed him and kept him from exploding. He held him close and cried along with him, he didn't tease him, or insult him, or tell him to suck it up. No name calling, he didn't roll his eyes or walk away or ignore him like every other person on earth had done.

He held him and comforted him and... and...

... and loved him.

He took in a breath, not daring to wipe his eyes. He'd just humiliated himself enough, and on the exhale he forced his face back into it's usual blank state.

Itachi wanted to help him... he could do that. But it wasn't going to be easy. There was 20 years of making up he had to do. He was going to push him to his limit, he was going to fight him every step of the way until he knew for damn sure that he wouldn't give up and leave him again.

It was going to take him years, he would pump every minute full of the hatred and sadness and desperation he'd felt, he would drive Itachi to the brink of insanity...

And maybe, if he still stayed, maybe he could start trying to forgive him...

He nodded to the older sibling, and Itachi seemed to understand all of this with just the simple action. He too turned back to autopilot and his eyes hardened in the split second it took him to nod in return.

*Game on, brother. Game on.*

A/N-

---

Sequel goes by the name of Recurring Nightmares. Though if you go right on over to my profile and skim through, you can probably figure that out by reading the summary.

Go read.

Now.

Seriously.

Oh and also review this one. n\_n